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Mortal coils

The Giaconda smile

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THE GIOCONDA SMILE

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Aldous Huxley

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

A PLAY

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THE GIOCONDA SMILE, A PLAY

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THE GIOCONDA SMILE

Act One

Scene I

The living room in the Hutton's country house. This is a severely modern room, one wall of which (the left, from the audience's point of view) consists almost wholly of glass. Glass doors give on to a veranda. On the other walls of the room hang a number of post-impressionist French paintings—a Braque, a Matisse, a Derain, a Picasso. There is a door in the back wall and another, down stage, on the right.

A small table is spread for lunch. HENRY HUTTON *sits facing the audience, with* JANET SPENCE *on his right. Opposite* JANET *is the place, momentarily unoccupied, of* NURSE BRADDOCK. HUTTON *is a man of about forty-five, handsome, full of charm, a good talker.* JANET *is about ten years younger, very well bred, very much a lady, but a little too intense in manner to be an altogether comfortable companion.*

As the scene opens, CLARA, *the parlormaid, is clearing away the first course and setting out the dessert plates.* HUTTON *picks up the decanter and turns to* JANET.

HUTTON

A little more claret?

JANET

Just a drop.

He pours some wine into her glass. At this moment the NURSE *enters and takes her place at the table. She is a large and rather formidable woman in her middle forties.* HUTTON *turns to address her.*

HUTTON

Well, did she eat her chicken?

NURSE

Just a few mouthfuls, that's all. It's one of her bad days, I'm afraid.

As HUTTON *moves the decanter in her direction, she puts her hand over her glass.*

No, no!

HUTTON

Sorry, I'd forgotten. Strictly teetotalitarian.

He refills his own glass.

I understand that Mussolini never drinks anything more inebriating than asses' milk. The devil has no small vices. He reserves all his energies for the really big things.

To JANET.

I must come over one of these evenings and have a game of chess with your father.

JANET

He'd love it. And, oh, that reminds me!

To NURSE.

We're in the most awful fix. Father's nurse has just told us that she wants to leave.

HUTTON

Who? That nice pretty young thing?

JANET

She's getting married.

NURSE

Getting married? I thought she had more sense than that.

JANET

You don't happen to know of anyone who could take her place, do you?

NURSE

Not for a paralysis case. We don't much care for paralysis cases as a rule. But I tell you what I'll do, Miss Spence. I'm going out this afternoon. I'll drop in at the hospital and talk to Matron about it.

JANET

That's really very kind of you.

NURSE

Not at all, dear. It's a real pleasure. Oh, and by the way,

Mr. Hutton, I hope you don't mind if I'm not back till late. Mrs. Hutton said she didn't have any objection.

HUTTON

So why ask me? And you certainly won't be brought home drunk and disorderly.

He indicates her glass of water; then turns to JANET.

I must show you my new picture after lunch.

JANET

Another one? Henry, aren't you ashamed of yourself?

HUTTON

I simply couldn't resist it. An early Modigliania. One of these extraordinary nudes.

JANET

I'd love to see it.

HUTTON

You must help me decide where to hang it. You too, Nurse.

NURSE

Don't hang it anywhere—that's *my* advice.

JANET

Don't you like it, Nurse?

NURSE

Like it? It makes me absolutely sick.

HUTTON

From which, my dear Janet, you can infer that it must be pretty good. Only the very best modern paintings make Nurse sick. The second-rate things don't cause anything worse than a touch of heartburn.

CLARA *hands the dessert to* JANET, *then to* NURSE.

NURSE

Mrs. Hutton didn't like it either. In fact, she . . .

HUTTON

. . . she thought it was positively disgusting. I knew that without your telling me.

NURSE

Rising with dignity and picking up her plate.

If you'll excuse me, Miss Spence, I'll go and take this up to the poor invalid.

HUTTON

You're not going to give her those red currants, are you?

NURSE

Why not?

HUTTON

Remember what Dr. Libbard said. Nothing with skins or pips.

NURSE

I believe in letting her have what she fancies. It does her more good than fussing around with diets and things.

HUTTON

All right, have it your own way; but don't blame me if it upsets her.

The NURSE *goes out without answering.*

HUTTON

If only somebody would marry this one instead of yours! The trouble is you'd have to find a man who was not only blind and deaf but also mentally deficient.

JANET

Poor thing! She certainly isn't very prepossessing.

HUTTON

And yet Emily fairly dotes on the woman. So here she is, for life—poisoning every meal I eat. There are two ways of being a martyr to ill-health. The first way is to suffer from it. The second is to suffer from the sufferers. I sometimes wish I could try the first way for a change.

JANET

To listen to you, one would think you were a monster. Luckily your friends know better.

HUTTON

Do they? Well, it's more than I do. All *I* know is that I'm

not St. Francis of Assisi. Nothing would induce me to kiss the leper. And, fortunately, I'm rich enough to pay other people to do it for me.

JANET

Why are you so cynical, Henry?

HUTTON

Because I enjoy the pleasures of an easy conscience. Cynicism is simply confession without repentance. You admit your sins, and so you get rid of the unpleasant necessity of concealment and hypocrisy; but, having confessed, you neither repent nor reform. You advertise your shortcomings and you persist in them.

JANET

What nonsense you talk, Henry! Everybody knows how patient and kind you've always been.

HUTTON

In other words, what a very adequate income I've always had.

JANET

Darling Emily—I'm absolutely devoted to her. But I have to admit . . . well, she doesn't make life too easy for the people around her. Or for herself, if it comes to that.

HUTTON

She's her own worst enemy, of course. But then who isn't his own worst enemy?

JANET

After a pause.

I often wonder what *I'd* do, if I were ill and lonely and felt that nobody really cared for me. I think I'd commit suicide.

HUTTON

One doesn't commit suicide because one has a reason for killing oneself. One does it because . . . well, because that's how one's mind happens to work. I've known lots of people whose life was obviously not worth living; and yet the idea of putting an end to it never even entered their heads.

JANET

But if you knew that, because of your life, other people's lives weren't worth living, wouldn't that make a difference?

HUTTON

Not a bit of it. It would probably make you hold on even tighter—just to annoy your friends. Some people kill themselves out of spite; and some refrain from killing themselves, also out of spite. On the surface, the symptoms are slightly different; but at bottom it's always the same disease.

JANET

Well, I hope that if ever I felt I was in the way, I'd have the strength of mind to get rid of myself.

HUTTON

You'd have the strength of mind now, when it isn't neces-

sary. But if you ever *were* in the way, you'd only have the strength of mind to sit tight.

JANET

Now, don't make a joke of it, Henry.

HUTTON

I'm not making a joke; I'm trying to tell the dismal truth.

JANET

You don't believe I'd have the courage?

HUTTON

It isn't a question of courage. It's just a matter of physiological reactions.

JANET

If I couldn't do it myself, I'd ask someone else to do it.

HUTTON

No, you wouldn't. Not at that stage of the proceedings.

JANET

I'd ask them in advance, while my judgment was still good. I'd make them promise that, if ever I came to be a burden, they'd . . . well, you know; I'd make them promise to do what I ought to do myself.

HUTTON

Dear Janet, you're incorrigibly high-minded! Like the noblest Roman of them all.

To the housemaid, who has just entered and is moving about the room as though looking for something.

What is it, Maise?

MAISE

Mrs. Hutton wanted her smelling salts.

HUTTON

Is she feeling faint?

MAISE

No, sir, I don't think so She just wanted her smelling salts Oh, here we are.

She finds the bottle and goes out.

HUTTON

"She just wanted her smelling salts!"

He sighs and shakes his head.

Sometimes I just want to go to Patagonia and never come back.

There is a long silence. CLARA *enters with the coffee things.* HUTTON *turns to her.*

On the table in the veranda, please.

To JANET.

Shall we get up?

They rise and go out on to the veranda. HUTTON *picks up the coffeepot and is about to fill the cups.*

JANET

I'm impatient to see that picture, Henry.

HUTTON

All right. You deal with the coffee.

He re-enters the room, where CLARA *has begun to move the dining chairs against the wall.* HUTTON *slides back a large panel. Through the opening* CLARA *pushes the dining table, which runs on castors.*

CLARA

Thank you, sir.

She goes out. HUTTON *closes the panel, goes to a corner and pulls out an easel into the center of the floor. From a pile of canvases leaning against the wall he selects one and places it on the easel. Meanwhile* JANET, *with her back to the audience, has been pouring out the coffee.*

JANET

Emily takes sugar, doesn't she?

HUTTON

Without turning round.

Yes, give her a lot. She likes something to take away the taste of her medicine.

JANET

I'll put an extra lump in the saucer.

HUTTON

There!

He turns, walks out onto the veranda, and picks up

one of the cups of coffee, which JANET *has poured out.*

JANET

No, that's Emily's cup. You couldn't drink it; it's like syrup.

HUTTON *puts it down, picks up another cup and drinks.* NURSE *re-enters, dressed in outdoor clothes.*

Well, how's your patient, Nurse?

NURSE

Oh, as well as you can expect, all things considered. I'll take up the coffee at once, if you don't mind. I've got my bus to catch.

She picks up the bottle of medicine.

HUTTON

Don't you bother, Nurse. I'll do this.

He takes the bottle from her and measures out a dose into a glass.

NURSE

No, really . . .

HUTTON

Drink it. You've just got time.

He indicates the NURSE'S *cup of coffee.*

NURSE

Grudgingly.

Well, that's very kind of you, I'm sure.

HUTTON *puts* EMILY'S *coffee cup and the medicine glass on a small tray and moves toward the door.*

HUTTON

And don't make yourself sick by looking at this.

He points to the picture on the easel, and goes out. There is a silence. JANET *looks after him.*

NURSE

That poor Mrs. Hutton!

JANET *starts and looks around.*

I feel so terribly sorry for her.

JANET

Yes, with a heart in that condition, I suppose she might go at any moment. Any moment . . .

NURSE

It isn't her health I'm thinking about. It's . . . well, you know!

A pause.

Miss Spence, I could tell you things that would make your hair stand on end.

JANET

What sort of things?

NURSE

The sort of things you find out, if you've been nursing for

twenty-three years. In the best families, what's more. When I think of that poor angel upstairs there . . .

JANET

Yes, what a tragic fate! When I first knew her, Emily was a beauty. Had her pictures in the papers, and all that sort of thing. Then came her illness, and that dreadful disfigurement.

She touches her own face to indicate the nature of the disfigurement.

And suddenly there was nothing left to her. None of the things that had made her life worth living. No parties, no theaters, no admirers, nobody to court her and flatter her, nobody even to listen to her.

NURSE

Isn't that typical of men. Sex—that's all *they* care about. Nothing but sex. I wouldn't trust any of them. Not if it was the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. Did Mrs. Hutton ever talk to you about . . . you know?

She glances toward the door.

JANET

No. What does she say?

NURSE

Just like all the rest. Sex—that was the only thing *she* ever meant to him. And when that was finished—well, good-by. It's a wonder he hasn't gone off with someone else.

JANET

He wouldn't do that. He's too loyal.

NURSE

You mean, he knows which side his bread is buttered. Look at the money she's got.

JANET

That's got nothing to do with it. He doesn't depend on her money. He's a rich man in his own right.

NURSE

The richer people are, the more they value money. That's what I've always found. And besides, if a man's rich, he can get all the sex he wants just by paying for it. No scandal, no divorce. Money, that's all.

JANET

Does Mrs. Hutton suspect . . . ? I mean, does she think there's another woman?

NURSE

Oh, he's clever enough to keep things dark. But, I tell you, we wouldn't be surprised at anything.

JANET

Mrs. Hutton and you seem to have talked things over a great deal.

NURSE

Now, dear, you mustn't feel jealous. There's nobody she cares for more than you. She's told me that again and again. But, after all, you're not a registered nurse; you're not even married. She'd feel embarrassed talking to you. Whereas, I'm like the doctor. You don't mind taking off your clothes for the doctor, do you? Well, that's how she feels about talking to me. And then, though I say it as shouldn't, she likes me, she feels I'm a friend. I'll tell you something. Do you remember that brooch of hers—that diamond dragon fly?

JANET

Yes, I know the one you mean.

NURSE

Well, she's going to leave that to me in her will.

JANET

Oh, I'm so glad. That means she cares for you—and poor Emily has so few people to care for.

NURSE

And so few who care for her, Miss Spence.

She puts on her gloves.

Well, I must fly, if I'm going to catch my bus.

JANET

And if you should hear of somebody who can look after my father . . .

NURSE

Don't worry, dear. Matron will find someone for you.

She bends down and picks up a large tin standing in a corner of the veranda. She reads the words on the label.

EUREKA WEED KILLER. POISON. CONTAINS ARSENIC. It's that idiot of a gardener. Imagine, leaving it here where the dogs can get at it! But, that's just what you'd expect a man to do. It's typical.

She goes out, carrying the tin. JANET *stands unmoving for a few seconds, then goes in and sits down in front of the easel.* HUTTON *re-enters.*

HUTTON

Well, what do you think of it?

He takes his place behind her chair.

JANET

It's really lovely.

HUTTON

And to think he might still be alive and painting these things! I have no patience with these people who die young. All these Keatses and Shelleys and Schuberts—it's just idiotic. Make a note of it, Janet; you're invited to lunch on my eightieth birthday.

JANET

You're sure you won't be a bit bored with me by then?

HUTTON

No. I'll still be wondering what's going on behind that mysterious little smile of yours. What *is* going on, by the way?

She smiles up at him without speaking.

Or is nothing going on? You know how wonderfully spiritual a dog can look. Like the soul's awakening. And then suddenly it starts hunting for fleas.

JANET

You think that's the sort of person I am?

HUTTON

I wish I could. It's so restful when women are like that. What you do is what Modigliani does.

JANET

How do you mean?

HUTTON

Look at this figure. Perfectly flat. And yet all the modelling's there. It's the line. If the line's good enough, it implies the volumes. You know there's a third dimension. Well, some people are like that. They're flat; they don't say anything in particular; they make no obvious effort to express themselves. And yet you're aware of depths and volumes and psychological spaces. Well, you're one of those people.

JANET

I don't know whether to be flattered or offended.

HUTTON

Both and neither. It's a wonderful thing to have a rich personality. But if you do have a rich personality, it can't fail to include a good number of quirks and oddities—not to mention the other things, the shameful things, the reptiles in the basement, the black beetles behind the wainscot.

JANET

And that's me, is it?

HUTTON

That's you, my mysterious Gioconda.

JANET *throws him one of her smiles; then looks away and is silent for a moment.*

JANET

This reminds me of the first time I ever saw a post-impressionist painting.

HUTTON

When was that?

JANET

"When was that?"

She shakes her head.

That just shows how little we can communicate with one another. We're each on our own little island. You wave to

me; I wave to you. But we can never land on anyone else's island, never find out how he lives, what he thinks and feels.

HUTTON

Perhaps that's something we should be grateful for. I know I'd be horribly embarrassed if anyone came ashore and started exploring.

JANET

And yet it's terrible to realize one's isolation. For example, something happens to you, something enormously important and significant. And yet, for the person who was with you when it happened, the person who was the cause of its happening, it doesn't mean anything at all. Do you remember a young woman who came back from India, just after the war?

HUTTON

A very charming and beautiful young woman.

JANET

That's neither here nor there. The point is that you showed her your pictures; you took the trouble to explain to her what they were all about.

HUTTON

Oh, I begin to remember.

JANET

But *she* never forgot—that's the difference. Do you know

what you did for me, Henry? You opened a door, and there were all the things I'd only heard about—painting, criticism, music. It was like a revelation, like a conversion. And you didn't feel anything of what I felt.

HUTTON

How could I? After all, I hadn't spent the best years of my life in an Indian garrison town.

JANET

And to think that, but for you and the grace of God, I might be there now! A colonel's lady—that's what I'd be by this time.

HUTTON

And who knows? Perhaps you'd be very happy, my dear. Perhaps you made a great mistake when you turned down your nice young captain.

JANET

Henry, how can you say that?

HUTTON

After all, a man can have very bad taste in art and yet be a very good husband. And vice versa, I may add.

JANET

But the one doesn't *necessarily* exclude the other.

HUTTON

No, I've known people who could make the best of both worlds. Such as a certain person who likes this sort of thing.

He indicates the painting on the easel.

And yet how happy I'd be if I had a daughter who'd look after me as devotedly as you look after your father.

JANET

You talk as though I were a monster of altruism!

HUTTON

I'm sorry, my dear—you are. But in spite of it, you can look at this without being made to feel absolutely sick, like Nurse or poor Emily.

JANET

How strange that Emily never learned to care for painting!

HUTTON

Oh, but she does! She cares a great deal. But her taste isn't very catholic. She likes portraits, and only portraits of herself, and then only if they're flattering and by very expensive painters.

CLARA *enters.*

CLARA

Excuse me, sir. Mrs. Hutton says, would you please come upstairs for a minute.

HUTTON

Tell her I'll go later on.

CLARA

She wants you to come now, sir.

HUTTON

Oh, very well, very well. Sorry, Janet. I won't be long.

JANET

I'll have to be going in a moment, anyhow.

HUTTON

But wait till I come back. Please.

JANET

Of course.

He goes out. CLARA, *meanwhile, is collecting the coffee things.*

JANET

Clara, is Mrs. Hutton feeling worse?

CLARA

Not that I know of, Miss. And, anyhow, worse or better, it doesn't make much difference.

JANET

It must be hard work for you with an invalid in the house.

CLARA

Oh, you get used to it, Miss. You get used to anything.

JANET

Yes, you get used to anything—until the moment comes . . when you say, that's enough!

CLARA

And a lot of good *that* does you! Because, when you come down to it, one thing's just as bad as another. That is, if it isn't worse. You may have invalids here; but if you go somewhere else, it'll be drink, or stinginess, or carrying on with actresses, or Roman Catholics, or pet monkeys. You can change your situation as much as you like—there's always something wrong. So stay where you are. That's *my* advice.

She goes out, carrying the coffee things. JANET *sits down, picks up a book and starts to read.* DORIS MEAD *tiptoes across the veranda, entering from the garden, and peers in. She does not see* JANET, *who is seated in a high-backed chair that conceals her.* DORIS *enters the room. She is eighteen and provocatively pretty.* JANET *hears the sound of her footsteps and leans out of her chair to see who is there.*

JANET

What are you doing here?

DORIS

Oh!

She starts violently.

JANET

Are you looking for somebody?

DORIS

Yes . . . Mr. Hutton.

JANET

Was he expecting you?

DORIS

Well, not exactly. But, I mean . . . he knows who I am.

JANET

Why didn't you ring at the front door?

DORIS

I . . . I came through the garden. It was shorter. I mean . . .

The door is flung open and HUTTON *comes into the room, speaking as he enters.*

HUTTON

Well, it was nothing, of course. Just fuss for fuss's sake.

He catches sight of DORIS *and a look of startled apprehension appears on his face. Then he readjusts his expression, smiles politely and, advancing, shakes hands with her.*

Miss Mead! What a pleasant surprise! I don't think you know Miss Spence.

Turning to JANET.

Miss Mead is collecting subscriptions for the Crippled Children's Homes.

To DORIS.

I've got the check ready for you, Miss Mead.

DORIS

Oh . . . thank you.

HUTTON

The only thing is that I'd like to earmark the money for spastics.

He goes to the writing table and picks up some papers.

I couldn't quite make out what form I had to fill up.

To JANET.

I hope you'll excuse me.

JANET

I'll say good-by, Henry.

HUTTON

No, no. I won't be a moment.

JANET

But I've got to go.

She holds out her hand.

Thank Emily for me, and tell her how sorry I am I couldn't see her.

HUTTON

I will.

He moves toward the door with her.

JANET

No, don't bother. I'll find my way out. You've got your cripples. Good-by, Miss Mead.

DORIS

Good-by.

HUTTON

I'll ring up tomorrow and see what we can settle about that game of chess with your father.

JANET

Yes, do that.

She throws him a final smile and goes out. HUTTON *turns and advances on* DORIS *with an angry expression.*

HUTTON

You little idiot!

DORIS

Oh, Teddy Bear!

She tries to throw her arms round his neck, but he pushes her away.

HUTTON

No, no, none of that. I'm very angry with you. You know quite well you've got no business to come here.

DORIS

I know, darling. But I was with Lily Peters in her car, and when we passed the gate, I just couldn't resist it.

HUTTON

And you see what happened? It's lucky I had those papers lying there.

DORIS

You were wonderful, Teddy Bear. Crippled children . . . !

She laughs.

HUTTON

There's nothing to giggle about. If you got the spanking you deserve, *you'd* be a crippled child.

He gives her a sound smack on the behind.

There, sit down, before anything worse happens to you.

She sits down on the sofa and he takes his place beside her. DORIS *looks round the room. Her eye comes to rest on a large picture by Matisse, representing several blank-faced and distorted nudes, squatting or reclining in the midst of gaudily patterned draperies, near a table and vase of flowers that seem to lean forward.*

DORIS

Goodness! What's that?

HUTTON

Rather nice, isn't it?

DORIS

But, Teddy Bear . . .

She looks at him, sees that he appears to be perfectly serious; then looks back at the picture.

But . . . but girls *aren't* like that. I mean, you wouldn't like it if I . . .

She breaks off in embarrassment. HUTTON *bursts out laughing and puts an arm about her.*

HUTTON

No, I certainly wouldn't. But, fortunately, you're not a piece of canvas.

DORIS *nestles close to him.* HUTTON'S *desires get the better of his annoyance. He kisses her once, draws back, then kisses her again with a kind of ferocity.* DORIS *goes limp in his arms. When he next draws back, she opens her eyes, smiles and starts to rumple his hair.*

DORIS

You look like a gollywog.

HUTTON

I won't say what *you* look like. It wouldn't pass the censor.

DORIS

You beast!

She gives his hair a sharp tweak. He catches her wrist, brings her hand to his mouth and bites it.

Ow, you're hurting me!

HUTTON

Good!

He bites her hand again.

Cannibalism . . .

DORIS *withdraws her hand, and her face assumes a serious expression.*

DORIS

Teddy Bear, do you love me?

HUTTON

Like a cannibal!

DORIS

No, this isn't a joke. I mean, do you *really* love me?

HUTTON

Do I *really* love you? Well, I must first know what your definition of reality is. Are you an empiricist? Do you believe exclusively in concrete particulars—such as this ear, that absurd little nose, this delicious mouth?

He touches DORIS's *ear, nose and mouth as he names them.*

Or, on the other hand, are you a Platonic idealist? Do you believe that Love with a large L exists before any particular love with a little *l*? In other words, do you regard concepts as prior to percepts?

DORIS

Stop it! I hate it when you talk nonsense.

HUTTON

Sorry, my pet; I thought I was talking metaphysics.

DORIS

I know you don't really love me. But I don't care. I can love enough for two. You know, if I didn't love you, I'd think you were horrible.

HUTTON

The same to you, my duck, and many of them!

He gives her a little fillip on the tip of the nose with his forefinger.

What about having dinner with me tonight?

DORIS

Oh, Teddy Bear, that would be wonderful.

HUTTON *whispers something in her ear.* DORIS *laughs nods her head, then hides her face against his coat.*

HUTTON

Good! But, now you've got to promise me something. Never come to this house again. It's pointless, it's idiotic and it's dangerous. So, you mustn't.

DORIS

All right, I promise.

A pause.

Tell me, Teddy Bear, is . . . is *she* in the house?

HUTTON

Who do you mean?

DORIS

You know quite well who I mean. Is she still so ill?

HUTTON

Let's talk about something else.

DORIS

I know—I'm not fit to mention her!

HUTTON

Don't talk nonsense. It's simply a question of tact, of good taste.

DORIS

In other words, you're ashamed. You don't want to be reminded of what you're doing—you just want to do it and not think about it. And do you know what that means? It means you don't really care for me. *I'm* not ashamed. I wouldn't mind telling everybody. Because I love you, because I feel this is the best thing I've ever done. You certainly don't feel that.

HUTTON

With a wry smile.

No, one doesn't feel too proud of . . . well, of being a seducer.

DORIS

Being a seducer! I like that. Do you remember the first time you kissed me? Well, I'd made up my mind beforehand that I was going to make you kiss me. And I did make you.

HUTTON

Well, I'm damned!

DORIS

So, you see, you needn't feel so guilty. But I won't talk about her, Teddy Bear. I know it makes you miserable. And, besides, I'm dreadfully sorry for her really. *And* for you, if it comes to that.

HUTTON

Why for me?

DORIS

Because you can't be as happy as I am.

A pause.

The one who was here just now—was that *Janet* Spence?

HUTTON

Yes.

DORIS

I didn't imagine she was like that—not from the way you've talked about her. Why, she's as old as the hills.

HUTTON

Well, of course, from your point of view she's practically got one foot in the grave. To me, she looks like a very attractive girl of thirty-five. She used to be really lovely ten years ago.

DORIS

And I suppose you flirted with her?

HUTTON

Naturally.

DORIS

Do you still flirt with her?

HUTTON

Only in the most spiritual way. We do a sort of Dante and Beatrice act. You know—soul mates.

DORIS *disengages herself from his embrace.*

What's the matter?

DORIS

Sometimes I really hate you.

HUTTON

But, luckily, you have your own inimitable way of showing it.

He tries to take her in his arms again, but she evades him.

Don't be silly! Can't you understand a joke?

DORIS

It isn't a joke. You *do* care for her.

HUTTON

I don't care for her. I just care for the things she cares about. She's the only person in this godforsaken neighborhood who isn't a barbarian or a Philistine.

DORIS

Which am I?

HUTTON

Neither. The question just doesn't arise so far as you're concerned.

DORIS

You mean, I'm just a body, so it doesn't matter what sort of a mind I've got.

HUTTON

I mean that you're Aphrodite, and Aphrodite doesn't have to be either Hera or Pallas Athene.

DORIS

That's just a fancy way of saying I'm a fool, but I'm pretty. Oh, I wish I weren't so stupid and ignorant!

HUTTON

Everybody's stupid and ignorant about something. I know a little about literature, but I'm ignorant of mathematics.

Einstein knows a lot about relativity, but he's ignorant of boxing. You're ignorant of modern art, but you know quite a lot about being a woman—and that's more than a great many women know.

He looks at his watch.

What about going for a drive before dinner?

DORIS

Oh, that'll be lovely!

HUTTON

Where to? Ivinghoe Beacon?

DORIS

Yes! Do you remember those butterflies we saw there last time? Like sparks of blue fire. And afterwards on the scabious flowers—opening and shutting their wings. Blue, blue—and then underneath, it was like silver freckles. Let's go, Teddy Bear.

HUTTON

All right, I'll go and get my things and tell them I shan't be in this evening.

He goes out. Doris gets up and tiptoes inquisitively about the room, fingering the objects of art, opening the books. Then she comes to a halt in front of a still life by Braque. She looks at it intently for a time, then tries the effect of looking at it upside down. While she is doing this, she hears HUTTON *returning and hastily straightens herself up. He enters.*

HUTTON

Well, I've established my alibi. You'll be glad to hear that I'm dining with old Mr. Johnson to discuss the war memorial. At the present rate of progress it'll be ready just in time for the next little massacre to end all massacres.

While he speaks, he fills his cigar case from the silver box on the table.

Or even the next but one. That is, if there's anything left of us by then.

He takes DORIS's *arm and they go out through the French window.*

Meanwhile, my pet,

> The grave's a fine and private place,
> But none, I think, do there embrace.

From which we can draw only one conclusion.

DORIS

What's that?

HUTTON

Wait and see.

CURTAIN

Act One

Scene II

The same, about midnight. The room is in complete darkness; but outside there is moonlight. HUTTON *comes in from the garden, crosses the veranda, enters and turns a switch. The light reveals* DR. LIBBARD, *who has been dozing on the sofa. He is a man in his late fifties, quiet and slow spoken.*

HUTTON

Libbard! Is my wife ill?

LIBBARD

The servants tried to reach you at Mr. Johnson's. But they had no news of you there.

HUTTON

No, I was detained. I . . . I had a breakdown.

LIBBARD

Your wife kept asking to see you.

HUTTON

I'll go up to her at once.

He starts to move toward the door.

LIBBARD

I'm afraid it's too late.

HUTTON

Too late?

He looks at his watch.

Yes, I suppose she's asleep.

LIBBARD

Mrs. Hutton passed away about four hours ago.

HUTTON

You mean . . . she's dead?

LIBBARD

Unfortunately, I was out when they called me. I didn't get here till it was all over. And, as bad luck would have it, it was the nurse's day out, too. The only person who was with her, except for the maids, was Janet Spence.

HUTTON

Oh, they sent for Janet, did they?

LIBBARD

I think her presence must have been a great comfort to poor Emily. These heart attacks—they give you such an awful sense of apprehension. Sheer animal panic. It's a great help to be able to hold somebody's hand, to feel you're not completely abandoned.

HUTTON

It's strange; she hadn't been complaining of her heart these last days.

LIBBARD

It came on suddenly. There was a violent attack of nausea in the afternoon. That was the thing that knocked out the heart. I understand from the maid that she'd eaten some red currants at lunch.

HUTTON

Do you mean to say *that* could have killed her?

LIBBARD

Indirectly, yes. When a heart's in the condition hers was in, you can't risk the smallest indiscretion. The cause is trivial, but the consequences may be disastrous.

The door is opened a little way and the NURSE *looks into the room. She has just come in and is still dressed in her outdoor clothes.*

NURSE

Oh, excuse me. I saw a light in here and I wondered . . . Is anything wrong?

HUTTON

Bitterly.

Nothing—except that you've managed to kill your patient.

NURSE

What do you mean?

LIBBARD

Mrs. Hutton died of heart failure while you were out.

HUTTON

And it was because you let her have those currants. Do you remember? I warned you at the time. But you insisted on taking them to her. You wanted to have your own way, didn't you?

LIBBARD

Is this true, Nurse?

NURSE

But she . . . she liked them so.

LIBBARD

You know how strongly I've always insisted on a bland diet.

NURSE

I didn't think that a few currants . . .

LIBBARD

That's enough, Nurse. You went against my instructions. You were absolutely in the wrong. Admit it.

The NURSE *starts to cry.*

HUTTON

Yes, admit you killed her.

LIBBARD

Please, Hutton. This is a professional matter. We don't

want any rhetoric injected into it. We don't want any violent emotions. And, besides, these are not the kind of emotions that are going to do *you* any good. You're just trying to distract yourself from the real issue. She's dead and you're still alive. That's what you've got to think about. So far as you're concerned, everything else is just irrelevant.

HUTTON

Yes, you're quite right.

JANET *enters.*

JANET

Henry!

She goes over to HUTTON, *takes one of his hands in both of hers and stands for several seconds in silence.*

She looks so calm now, so beautiful. You feel she's come home at last; come home and gone to sleep.

HUTTON

I think I'll go up to her room.

JANET

Yes, do that, Henry.

He goes out. JANET *approaches the* NURSE *and puts an arm about her shoulders.*

I know it must have come as a terrible shock to you. You were so devoted to her.

NURSE

Brokenly.

Dr. Libbard says it was my fault.

JANET

Turning to LIBBARD.

Her fault?

LIBBARD

I gave certain instructions; Nurse Braddock chose to ignore them. Whether this was actually responsible for what happened tonight, I can't say. But, it most certainly might have been. Currants are about the last thing I'd have allowed Mrs. Hutton to eat.

JANET

You think it was the currants?

LIBBARD

She didn't eat anything else that could have upset her like this.

He goes over to the NURSE, *who is bitterly sobbing, and lays a hand on her shoulder.*

You'd better go to bed. There's no point in your sitting up any longer. You can't do anything for anyone.

The NURSE *gets up and, still holding her handkerchief to her face, goes out.*

JANET

What are you going to do about this, Dr. Libbard?

LIBBARD

I suppose I ought to report her to her organization. The odd thing is that she's really a first-rate nurse. Careful, conscien-

tious, never silly or absent-minded—and, yet, here she does something that's absolutely inexcusable.

JANET

I think I know why she did it.

LIBBARD

I suppose she cared too much for her patient—thought she was doing the poor woman a favor.

JANET

Yes, she really loved Emily. But, that's only part of the explanation. The other part is that she wanted to spite Henry.

LIBBARD

Why?

JANET

She didn't like him, that's all.

LIBBARD

Just because he belongs to the male sex, I suppose. Some of them get like that.

JANET

Henry was always very keen on Emily's sticking to her diet. That was enough to make Nurse Braddock pooh-pooh the whole thing.

LIBBARD

With the result that she kills the person she's most attached to. It's extraordinary how closely tragedy resembles farce. In fact, they're basically the same. The only difference is that farce is something incongruous that happens to strangers. Tragedy is something incongruous that happens to oneself, or one's friends. If we hadn't known Emily, what a grotesque and ludicrous story this would be! Oh dear!

He sighs. A pause.

JANET

I haven't had a chance to tell you, Dr. Libbard; my father's nurse is leaving us.

LIBBARD

My poor Janet!

JANET

I was thinking I'd ask Nurse Braddock to come and take her place. That is, if you feel she'd be all right.

LIBBARD

Well, as I've said, she's an uncommonly good nurse. And I don't think there'd be any psychological difficulties, would there?

JANET

No, I think she likes me quite well.

LIBBARD

And the General's an old man, and paralyzed into the bar-

gain. So, I don't see why she should feel any subconscious resentment against him.

JANET

The only thing is that, if you were going to report her . . .

LIBBARD

It's hard to know where one's duty lies. If she were a bad nurse, I wouldn't have any hesitation. But, she's a good nurse. I've always been more than satisfied with her up till now. I'd hate to ruin the poor woman's career.

JANET

Do you think there'd be any danger of her making this kind of a mistake with us?

LIBBARD

No, I don't.

A pause.

All right. I won't say anything on condition she goes to you. I'll still be in touch with her in that case. I can rub the lesson in from time to time.

JANET

I think you're very generous, Dr. Libbard.

LIBBARD

One just tries to use a little discrimination, that's all.

JANET

Should I go and talk to her, do you think?

LIBBARD

Do. The poor woman was obviously in an awful state. I'll wait here for Hutton.

JANET *goes out.* LIBBARD *walks up and down the room.* HUTTON *re-enters and silently takes a seat.*

LIBBARD

Well, there's nothing to say, of course. Just a lot of platitudes that don't signify anything. One talks in one universe; one dies and one suffers in another. They're incommensurable. There's no connection. I found that out when Margaret died.

HUTTON

You two were very close, weren't you?

LIBBARD

We'd been married nearly thirty years.

HUTTON

Thirty years. . . . And yet it isn't the time that counts. It's what you feel, what you are.

He picks up a framed photograph from the writing table and hands it to LIBBARD.

Do you remember Emily as she was then?

LIBBARD

Margaret used to say she was like the princess in a fairy story.

HUTTON

And the girl that Shelley wrote his loveliest poem to—she was called Emily too.

Emily,
A ship is floating in the harbor now,
A wind is blowing o'er the mountain's brow;
The merry mariners are bold and free:
Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me?

And we did sail. We even landed on Shelley's enchanted island.

We two will rise and sit and walk together.
Under the roof of blue Ionian weather,
Or linger where the pebble-paven shore,
Under the quick faint kisses of the sea,
Trembles and sparkles as with ecstasy.

LIBBARD

Go on.

HUTTON

I'm trying to remember. Something, something . . .

. . . Or at the noontide hour arrive
Where some old cavern hoar seems yet to keep
The moonlight of the expired night asleep,
Through which the awakened day can never peep:
A veil for our seclusion, close as night's,
Where secure sleep may kill thine innocent lights.
Sleep, the fresh dew of languid love, the rain
Whose drops quench kisses till they burn again.

And we will talk, until thought's melody
Becomes too sweet for utterance, and it die
In words, to live again in looks, which dart
With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound.
Our breath shall intermit, our bosoms bound
And our veins beat together, and our lips,
With other eloquence than words, eclipse
The soul that burns between them . . .

I used to know it all, I used to repeat it to her . . .

A pause.

Shall I tell you where I was this evening?

LIBBARD

I don't think you need. It seems sufficiently obvious.

HUTTON

I suppose you think I'm pretty contemptible, don't you?

LIBBARD

Contemptible? I don't feel I have any right to pass that kind of a judgment.

HUTTON

Well, I do. And that's what I am, what I've always been—contemptible!

LIBBARD

I've never thought so. But, I've felt extremely sorry for you sometimes. Being born with a lot of money, as you

were, it's no joke. God knows it's dreary enough to have to earn one's living; but at least it gives a certain purpose and direction to one's existence. Whereas, a rich man, a man without a job or a family to support—there's nothing to make him attend to anything but his own tastes and appetites. Full of craving one moment—then he has what he wants, and he's sick with disgust and satiety. We're all like that, of course. But, if you've got to earn your living, you have to control yourself a little.

HUTTON

And if you're rich?

LIBBARD

If you're rich you can afford to live discontinuously, if you see what I mean, intermittently. And, in the last analysis, that's the same as not being quite human. Because, of course, being human isn't just a matter of having two legs and no tail. It's a matter of identifying oneself with some purpose larger than one's own beastly little cravings; it's a matter of living continuously in that purpose, not intermittently in the cravings. If you were a poor man, you'd be forced to identify yourself with the purpose of supporting your family. Being rich, you can leave that to somebody else. You're not forced to do anything in particular. You're free to choose.

HUTTON

And I've chosen to live subhumanly. Do you think I'm capable of changing?

LIBBARD

Of course—if you want to.

HUTTON

I *do* want to.

LIBBARD

At this moment, yes. But, it's so easy to be heroic in time of crisis. What's difficult is to behave even moderately well at ordinary times. Think of what happened during the war. All the courage and self-sacrifice; all the comradeship and mutual aid. All the hopes for an entirely new and better world. Well, now we're at peace and look what's happening. No courage, no self-sacrifice, no comradeship, no mutual aid and no hope. Just the old familiar squalor with a big crack in the veneer of civilization. And when you look through the crack, you see the abyss, you see all hell waiting to break through into the sunlight. Well, it's the same with individuals as it is with nations. At this moment you could do anything. But what will you be a month from now?

HUTTON

Do you think I'm as weak as all that?

LIBBARD

How should I know? It wouldn't surprise me if you were. And it wouldn't surprise me if you weren't. At fifty-eight I've stopped being surprised at anything.

HUTTON *goes to the desk and prepares to write a letter.*

LIBBARD

What are you doing?

HUTTON

Just a moment.

LIBBARD *gets up, goes out on to the veranda and looks up at the sky.*

LIBBARD

The moon's almost set. One can see more of the stars. What I hated most when I worked in London was never seeing the sky—only a lot of smoke, with whisky advertisements instead of constellations.

He re-enters the room and walks up and down, as he continues to talk.

That's what makes modern man so idiotically bumptious. He lives in a horrible little homemade universe and thinks he's conquered the God-made one. But, he hasn't conquered anything—he's merely changed the conditions of the battle, that's all. And, in many cases, he's changed them for the worse. He's multiplied his species to the point where most individuals can't get enough to eat—and the numbers are still rushing up. He's industrialized himself to the point where he's in danger of exhausting all his natural resources. Wasting assets—that's what our whole civilization's based on. A few of us are rich because modern man has chosen to get rid of his irreplaceable capital in the shortest possible time. And, that's what we call progress. How can anybody talk of progress, when there's still old age and death? Life isn't progressive. It's a wave that mounts, remains more or

less level for a time, then drops away—drops away into what happened this evening to poor Emily.

While he is speaking these last words, HUTTON *seals up his letter, stamps it and turns to* LIBBARD.

And Emily was one of the lucky minority. She could buy or hire everything our civilization has to offer. And I've seldom known anyone more unhappy than that poor woman was. Or more restricted, more shut in, less free, in spite of all her liberty of choice and movement. And now she's dead. And that's what progress has done for her, what it'll do for all of us sooner or later. Well, I must go. I've got a heavy day in front of me tomorrow.

HUTTON

Drop this in the letter box as you go by, will you?

He hands LIBBARD *the letter he has just written.*

LIBBARD

I'll try not to forget.

HUTTON

No, don't. It's important.

LIBBARD

Reading the address on the envelope.

"Miss Doris Mead." I can't believe that anyone called Doris can be as important as all that, Hutton.

HUTTON

Very important to say good-by to.

LIBBARD

Oh, I see. Then I certainly shan't forget.

He puts the letter in his pocket.

HUTTON

You're quite right: one doesn't know what one will be thinking and feeling a month from now. . . . So let's do the irrevocable today. Then one can't change one's mind tomorrow.

LIBBARD

You're growing wise in your old age. How does it go? "Tasks in hours of insight willed must be in hours of gloom fulfilled." And gloom's the right word, unfortunately.

JANET *re-enters and* LIBBARD *turns to her.*

Well, what news?

JANET

She's very grateful to you, Dr. Libbard.

LIBBARD

And you'll have a new nurse, I hope?

JANET

As soon as Henry will let her go.

HUTTON

The sooner the better, so far as I'm concerned.

LIBBARD

Good-by, Hutton. And if I can help you in any way—well, you know where to find me.

HUTTON

Thank you, Libbard; and thank you for what you've done for me already.

LIBBARD *pats him on the shoulder, then turns to* JANET.

LIBBARD

Good-by, Janet.

He goes out. There is silence.

JANET

Try not to feel too bitterly about that poor woman.

HUTTON

Do you mean the Nurse?

JANET

Nodding.

She didn't mean to do Emily any harm.

HUTTON

It would have been easier if she had. Malice is something one can deal with. But well-meaning stupidity . . .

He shrugs his shoulders.

It does more harm than wickedness and there's nothing you can do about it. It's congenital and incurable. I don't feel bitter; but . . . well, I'll be glad to see the last of her.

JANET

I'll get her out of the house tomorrow.

A silence.

HUTTON

I'm so thankful you were with poor Emily at the end. Did she . . . did she suffer much?

JANET *looks at him for a moment without speaking; then suddenly turns away and, covering her face, begins to sob uncontrollably.*

HUTTON

Janet!

He lays a hand on her shoulder.

Don't let's talk about it any more. It's been too much for you.

JANET

Between her sobs.

It was terrible; it was so terrible. I'd never seen anybody die before. I didn't realize . . .

She breaks off and hides her face against his coat. HUTTON *strokes her hair.*

HUTTON

Try to think of her only as she is now. She's at peace. The agony's over. You mustn't remember that. It's the peace that matters, it's the deliverance. Think of the deliverance.

There is a silence. At last JANET *raises her head and starts to dry her eyes.*

JANET

I'm sorry, Henry. I oughtn't to have let myself go like this. I . . . I just can't keep the memory away. It's like an obsession. . . . I suddenly see her, struggling for breath. With that awful look of pain and fear on her face.

She shudders.

But, of course, it's quite true: one must think of the deliverance. All those years of suffering and unhappiness—and now she's free.

HUTTON

Yes, she's free. But how terrible that she should have needed death to make her free!

JANET

What do you mean?

HUTTON

One ought to be able to achieve one's own freedom, not have to wait for it from outside. Interior freedom; freedom in the teeth of circumstances; freedom in spite of pain—yes, and in spite of pleasure, too. I'm no more free than Emily ever was. No freedom, no goodness, no order, no sense or meaning. . . . Just futility and squalor, squalor—like the moral equivalent of a slum. That's what my life has been and, in an obscure kind of way, I've always known it. But I wouldn't ever face the fact. Now it can't be ignored any more.

JANET

I don't know why you reproach yourself in this way.

HUTTON

You may not know; but *I* do.

JANET

Nobody's perfect, of course. But, you've got nothing to be ashamed of, Henry. I don't think so; none of your friends think so. You made Emily as happy as anyone could. She wasn't capable of being any happier.

HUTTON

Perhaps not. But I was capable of being . . . I won't say a better man, because that's claiming too much: I was capable of being a little more like a human being.

A pause.

Janet, will you help me?

JANET

You know I'd do anything to help you, Henry. . . .

HUTTON

Let's begin with some practical details. Poor Emily made her will a few months ago. I'm to have a life interest in the bulk of her property. It comes to a bit more than three thousand a year. Well, I'd like to turn the money over to some kind of charity.

JANET

Henry, what a wonderful idea!

HUTTON

I don't want merely to give it all to some existing organization. That's too easy; it doesn't involve anything more strenuous than writing checks. My notion was to run the thing myself. I want to give some work and thought as well as just money. This is where you come in, Janet—that is, if you feel like coming in.

JANET

You mean, you'll let me work with you? I'm pretty good at typing and accounts and that sort of thing.

HUTTON

I don't need a secretary. I need somebody to give me advice and encouragement.

JANET

Well, if you think I can do that . . .

HUTTON

I know you can.

There is a pause. JANET *smiles at him with an expression of almost rapturous happiness.*

HUTTON

I'll tell you what I had in mind. I've always been haunted by the thought of all the genius and talent that gets buried alive. I have no creative power myself; but I've got enough taste and imagination to realize what it must feel like to possess the power and be prevented from using it.

JANET

The frustration!

HUTTON

Like the frustration of sex. No, worse than that—the frustration of motherhood. Like a woman who's born to have children and finds herself shut up against her will in a convent.

JANET

In a low voice.

And she doesn't even believe in God.

HUTTON

To be born underground, to be brought up in a sepulcher, with the great stone of poverty lying across the entrance, and then to grow wings and to know that, if you could get out, you could fly—it's too horrible to think of. And in most cases all that's needed is a little sympathy and a little money—and the stone can be rolled away, the buried creature can come out into the sunshine.

JANET

And start flying.

HUTTON

And start flying. Well, that's what I want to do, Janet—to open a few graves before I die. Including my own, perhaps.

CURTAIN

Act Two

Scene I

The HUTTON'S *living room. The furniture is covered by dust sheets. Stepladders, tin cans, brushes and other equipment indicate that the room is in process of being redecorated. Between the window curtains we see the twilight of a late summer evening. Inside the room the electric lights are burning. The time is about two months after the death of* EMILY HUTTON. *When the curtain rises,* HUTTON *is engaged in sorting papers in a drawer of the writing table, which he has half uncovered for the purpose. On the floor beside him stands an open suitcase, into which he places certain papers, returning the rest to the drawer. While he is thus engaged,* JANET SPENCE *appears at the window and looks in through the space between the curtains. After a few seconds she raps on the glass.* HUTTON *turns sharply. Seeing* JANET, *he gets up and goes over to the French window to let her in. He is obviously annoyed and embarrassed at having been thus discovered; but he does his best to be cordial.*

HUTTON

He trips over a paint pot.

Janet! Damn these painters! What a pleasant surprise!

He lets her in, and they shake hands.

JANET

I'm the one to be surprised. I thought you were in Cornwall.

HUTTON

So did I, until this morning. I had to go to town unexpectedly. So, I thought I'd take the opportunity to do a little burglary on the way.

JANET

Without telling us you'd be here?

HUTTON

My dear, I simply didn't have the time to let you know. It was all decided in such a hurry. Besides, I'm just driving through, post haste. How on earth did you know I was here?

JANET

It was so hot, we decided to walk down to the village after dinner. And then suddenly I noticed a light in the house.

HUTTON

But you can't see the house from the road.

JANET

We were on the footpath.

HUTTON

Oh, the footpath.

JANET

So, I let the others go on and climbed over the fence.

HUTTON

More burglary! Well, I'm delighted.

Glances surreptitiously at his watch, hesitates a moment, then uncovers a chair.

This seems to be relatively free of paint. Sit down, won't you.

JANET

May I? I won't stay long. Only till the others get back from the village.

HUTTON

I hope they won't get caught in the rain. It looked pretty menacing just now.

He goes to the open suitcase and takes out of it a small leather box.

I'm glad you came, Janet. It'll save me writing a letter and going to the post office.

He hands her the box.

JANET

What's this?

HUTTON

Open it and see.

JANET *opens the box.*

JANET

But, Henry, it's . . . it's Emily's bracelet!

HUTTON

And Emily would want you to wear it.

JANET

Me?

HUTTON

I don't know anyone who has as much right to it as you do. Her best friend; the person who did more for her than any other.

He takes the bracelet and clasps it on her wrist.

JANET

Henry, I couldn't. I . . . I don't deserve it.

Greatly agitated, she tries to undo the bracelet; but HUTTON *prevents her.*

HENRY

Well, who else does, if you don't?

JANET

Here, take it.

She unclasps the bracelet and hands it to HUTTON.

HUTTON

But, Janet, she loved you. She'd want you to have something that would always remind you of her. And, you were very fond of her, weren't you?

JANET

No, Henry, I can't, I can't.

HUTTON

Janet, I shall be offended, if you won't take it.

JANET

Offended?

A pause.

Do *you* want me to have it?

HUTTON

Of course I want you to have it.

JANET *puts the bracelet back on her wrist and starts to fasten the clasp.*

JANET

I just felt it was too much.

HUTTON

Too much?

He shakes his head.

Not nearly enough.

JANET *gives him one of her smiles, then looks down at the bracelet.*

JANET

It's really very beautiful.

HUTTON

Do you mind if I finish off this little job, while we talk?

He indicates the suitcase and the drawer full of papers.

JANET

Of course not.

HUTTON *resumes his place beside the suitcase.*

JANET

As a matter of fact this saves *me* a letter too.

HUTTON

What about?

JANET

About our plans. About those graves we mean to open.

HUTTON

Oh, yes, yes.

JANET

I've got quite a lot to report.

HUTTON

Good.

His tone is politely unenthusiastic.

JANET

I've been going round, talking to some of the local schoolteachers—getting them to tell me about all the outstanding pupils they've had during the past few years. It's really been a very enlightening experience.

Distant thunder is heard.

I wish Emily could have listened to them.

HUTTON

It wasn't exactly Emily's cup of tea, I'm afraid.

JANET

With mounting enthusiasm.

But this would have interested her, Henry; this would really have touched her. You've no idea how sad most of the stories are, how tragic. A few of the children get scholarships—but those are the ones that know how to pass examinations. They'll end up as teachers, or lawyers, or engineers. But the ones we're interested in—the ones with a gift, the ones with some kind of creative ability—they hardly ever get the scholarships. The official system has no place for them. So, when their school time is over, they're just sent home and told to earn their living. Back into the sepulcher and then the stone is lowered over them and cemented into place.

More distant thunder.

HUTTON

Did you hear that?

JANET

Ignoring the thunder.

I went to see one of the boys they told me about. He's sixteen—works at the Johnsons' dairy farm. I think he gets about a pound a week. But you should see his drawings of animals!

HUTTON

Are they good?

JANET

They're amazing! Henry, that boy's worth helping. I'm sure you'll agree with me when you see what he does. You wouldn't have time to drive over now and have a look at it?

HUTTON

Out of the question, I'm afraid.

JANET

Well, I'll bring him to see you as soon as you get back. That'll be in two or three weeks, I suppose?

HUTTON

Noncommittally.

Thereabouts. Perhaps a little longer. Various things have turned up recently. I may have to be in town for a bit.

A louder peal of thunder.

What about your father and the Nurse? They're going to get awfully wet, aren't they?

JANET

Oh, they'll take shelter somewhere.

She goes over to the window and looks out.

I love thunderstorms, don't you?

HUTTON

Frankly, I don't. I once saw a man killed by lightning. Just a few feet away from me. It wasn't funny.

A violent wind starts to blow.

Goodness, this is like the overture to *William Tell.*

JANET

Who is still standing at the window.

Look at the trees. Writhing, struggling. As if they were trying to get free. But they can't, they can't. They're tied down. Like those poor children we're trying to help. Tied down by poverty. And the wind of the spirit blows through them, and all it can do is to torture them, tear them to pieces, destroy them. Henry, I'm so happy about what we're doing. I feel it's so important. And then it's wonderful to think poor Emily has a part in it—that in a sense she's doing more now than she could when she was alive.

There is a bright flash, followed by thunder. The lights go out.

HUTTON

I knew this would happen!

He gropes his way toward the door and runs into a stepladder.

Damnation!

JANET

Where are you going, Henry?

HUTTON

To get a candle.

JANET

Oh, don't! It's so wonderful like this. You can see the lightning so much better.

HUTTON

I'm not interested in seeing the lightning.

He goes out. JANET *remains by the window. There is another flash.* JANET *counts aloud.* "One, two, three, four." *Then comes the thunder.* HUTTON *re-enters.*

JANET

It was less than a mile away that time.

HUTTON

I can't find the matches.

He fumbles under the dust sheet on the table. The rain starts to fall in torrents.

JANET

Listen!

Ecstatically.

What a release! What a liberation!

HUTTON

Here we are. Thank goodness!

He strikes a match and lights the candle he has brought in.

JANET

It's like somebody who's had to keep everything locked up inside herself—and then suddenly she can let go. You must know what that's like, Henry.

HUTTON

Know what what's like?

JANET

Having to hide the thing that's most important to you; being forced to live a lie. Against your will, against all your feelings.

There is a flash, followed in a couple of seconds by thunder.

HUTTON

This is getting too close for my taste.

JANET

You can't be happy, if you're living a lie.

HUTTON

Can't you? I don't know.

JANET

But how could you be happy under those conditions? And, after all, everyone's got a right to happiness.

HUTTON

A right? Why should it be a right? I don't claim anything by right. I just take what happens to come my way and thank my lucky stars.

JANET

Poor Henry! You haven't had much happiness in your life, have you?

HUTTON

Sitting down.

Oh, I don't complain. I've done pretty well, all things considered. Health, money, books, pictures, not to mention friends and even . . .

A flash and almost instantly a thunderclap.

Golly, how I hate this!

With a laugh.

You're quite right, I'm far from happy at this moment.

JANET

You can make a joke of it. But, I know what you've been through, Henry. The isolation. The spiritual loneliness. I've known what that can be. You're surrounded by people, but you live in a vacuum. There's nobody to understand or sympathize, nobody you can talk to about your most precious thoughts and feelings.

HUTTON

Sympathetically.

Yes, your poor father. . . . It must have been pretty difficult sometimes.

JANET

Nodding.

So, you see, I realize what you've had to go through. Darling Emily! So sweet and kind, and with that touching, child-like quality! But, she was no companion for a man like you, she could never share in your tastes and interests. She could only . . .

JANET *is interrupted by an almost simultaneous flash and crash.*

HUTTON

Wincing.

It's right overhead.

JANET *utters a strange, excited, almost maniacal laugh.*

JANET

It's wonderful! It's like . . . it's like passion.

HUTTON

Now, Janet, you've been reading too many novels. Passion, passion . . .

JANET

But you know what I mean. Loving so much, or hating so

much, that at last it breaks out, in spite of yourself. Like lightning, like a thunderbolt, like the wind and the rain.

HUTTON

And woe to the man who hasn't got an umbrella!

More thunder.

This always makes me think of Benjamin Franklin. Sending up his little kite into the middle of an electrical convulsion. God knows why he wasn't killed. He certainly asked for it.

There is a pause. JANET *suddenly turns to him.*

JANET

Henry, we're free now. We needn't pretend any longer.

HUTTON

I . . . I don't quite understand.

JANET

I tried to hide it; but you must always have known, Henry. Just as I always knew about you.

HUTTON

About me?

JANET

Yes, of course. I knew what you felt, and I knew you'd never admit it—out of a sense of honor and duty. I admired you for that, Henry, even though I suffered from it. Those little jokes you used to hide behind! And then, how careful

I always had to be, never to talk about ourselves, only about books and pictures and music. Good acting—but we were never taken in by it, were we? We always knew what lay behind it. And now there's no more need for acting.

She drops on her knees beside his chair and takes one of his hands in both of hers.

It's been so long, Henry. And I cared so much, so much.

She presses his hand against her heart. Her face wears an expression of ecstasy; her eyes are closed, as though she were in a kind of trance. There is another flash of lightning, closely followed by thunder. HUTTON *looks down at her in an agony of embarrassment.*

HUTTON

Janet, please! We can't. It's . . . it's impossible.

JANET *opens her eyes and smiles at him happily.*

JANET

Henry, you've forgotten. We can do what we want now. There's nothing to prevent it any more. We don't have to think of anyone but ourselves.

She is silent, looking at him intently; then kisses his hands and once again looks up. When she speaks, it is in a passionate whisper.

Take me, Henry, take me . . .

She lifts her mouth toward his.

HUTTON

No, Janet. Really.

Panic-stricken, he disengages himself from her embrace.

You don't understand. We can't. We mustn't.

He gets up and walks over to the window. There is another, more distant flash of lightning. JANET *remains looking at him for a few seconds, then gets to her feet, hurries after him and takes his hand.*

JANET

Forgive me, Henry. Please forgive me.

HUTTON

My dear, don't let's say anything more about it. You're overwrought. It's the thunder.

JANET

I ought to have known how you'd feel about it. It's still too recent, too painful. Poor Emily . . .

HUTTON

Emily?

JANET *covers her face with her hands.*

JANET

That face . . . I thought I'd put it out of my mind. So frightened, so horribly frightened.

She uncovers her face and looks at him.

And I talked about . . . about us. No wonder it upset you. Can you forgive me, Henry?

HUTTON

Of course, of course.

He looks out of the window.

The storm seems to be moving away. It isn't raining quite so hard. Do you think we ought to take the car and see if we can rescue your father?

JANET

Ignoring his question.

Henry, this won't make any difference later on, will it?

HUTTON

Later on?

JANET

When the pain has worn off, when we can think of ourselves again, can think of the future without feeling that we're desecrating the past.

HUTTON

Oh, I see what you mean.

He hesitates, in embarrassed uncertainty; then makes a plunge.

Listen, Janet. I think I ought to tell you. While I was away in Cornwall, I . . .

He coughs and again hesitates.

JANET

What happened while you were in Cornwall?

HUTTON

Well, to cut a long story short, I got married.

JANET

After a long pause.

You got married?

HUTTON

With forced nonchalance.

It's someone you don't know. As a matter of fact, *I've* only known her for a few months. I'm sure you'll like her when you meet her. Of course, she *is* rather young—only about eighteen, as a matter of fact. Quite a baby . . .

JANET

Eighteen?

HUTTON

So, you see, she has plenty of time to learn. And she'll adapt herself soon enough. Young people seem to be so sensible nowadays, so much on the spot. Very different from what we were at their age.

JANET *suddenly breaks out into a peal of violently mirthless laughter.* HUTTON *looks at her apprehensively.*

HUTTON

What are you laughing at?

JANET

Oh, nothing in particular.

A silence. The electric light comes on again.

HUTTON

Thank goodness! Janet we're still friends, aren't we?

JANET

Of course we are! Better than ever. And how we shall chuckle over this, when we come to look back on it! The little joke you played on me, and the little joke I played on you!

HUTTON

The joke?

JANET

Why, of course. You didn't think I was serious, did you?

HUTTON

Hesitates, then forces a laugh.

No, no. Naturally, I didn't.

JANET

And when shall I have the pleasure of meeting your sweet little . . . what's her name, by the way?

HUTTON

Doris.

JANET

Your sweet little Doris. When are you going to . . . to inaugurate her?

There is a noise on the veranda.

JANET

What's that?

She looks out.

Father!

She opens the French window. NURSE BRADDOCK *pushes* GENERAL SPENCE *into the room in his wheel chair.*

Are you soaked?

She starts to brush the moisture off his coat and trousers.

NURSE

Just a wee bit wet, that's all. Luckily Dr. Libbard picked us up in his car.

Turning to HUTTON.

Good evening. Mr. Hutton.

HUTTON

Curtly.

Good evening.

To the GENERAL.

Well, General, this is like campaigning in the monsoon.

GENERAL

Damned women . . . tell them to stop fussing.

LIBBARD *enters in time to hear these last words. He pats the* GENERAL'S *shoulder.*

LIBBARD

That's exactly how I feel, General. All the same I think it might be wise to get yourself rubbed down with a dry towel. Would that be too much trouble, Hutton?

HUTTON

Of course not.

To NURSE.

You know where the towels are kept. Take whatever you need.

NURSE

Thank you, I'll do that.

She starts to wheel the GENERAL *toward the door.*

GENERAL

Where the devil are you taking me?

NURSE

In the tone of one who tries to calm a naughty child.

Now, now, now! No swearing.

JANET

I'll be with you in a moment, Nurse.

The NURSE *goes out.* JANET *turns to* LIBBARD.

JANET

Guess what Henry has brought back from Cornwall, Dr. Libbard?

LIBBARD

Well, what does one bring back from Cornwall? I seem to remember paper weights made of malachite—no, serpentine; isn't that the stuff?

JANET

It isn't a paper weight. It's alive.

LIBBARD

Alive? Well, one used to be able to get the most wonderful parrots at Falmouth. Brought back by the sailors. And what a vocabulary! Is it one of those?

JANET

Shaking her head.

It's a mammal.

HUTTON

Protesting.

Janet!

JANET

Well, isn't it?

LIBBARD

A mammal. Well, let's say a dog? A pony? A marmoset? A badger? A Siamese cat?

JANET *shakes her head after each suggestion.*
I give it up.

JANET
A wife.

She turns and goes out. There is a silence.

LIBBARD
Well, I suppose I ought to congratulate you, Hutton.

HUTTON
Thank you.

LIBBARD
And yet, I posted that letter you gave me. Most faithfully. It wasn't quite as irrevocable as you thought?

HUTTON
No, it wasn't.

A pause.

Do you remember in the Gospels—all those people possessed by devils? Nobody believes in that sort of thing nowadays. And yet, isn't it the most plausible explanation of some of the things we do? Things that we know are against our own interest. Things that are obviously wrong and idiotic and suicidal. And yet, we do them. Or is it somebody else, inside, that does them in spite of us?

LIBBARD
Well, that's one way of disclaiming responsibility. The

other way, the more modern way, is to call the devils traumas and complexes, and say it's all your mother's fault for having weaned you too early. And probably she *did* wean you too soon, and perhaps there *are* devils. But, there's also such a thing as free will.

HUTTON

Yes, there's such a thing as free will; and you can use your will to get rid of your will.

LIBBARD

That's the purpose of religion, isn't it? "Not I, but God in me."

HUTTON

And what about "not I, but trauma in me? Not I but complex; not I but Lucifer? Not I but Belial in me—Belial, Eros, Priapus."

LIBBARD

Yes, if you don't have the right religion, you've got to have one of the wrong ones. Anything to take one outside of one's own insufferable self—anything, however bad and dangerous, provided it's a reasonably effective substitute for the genuine article.

HUTTON

And Belial's probably the most effective.

LIBBARD

Not for everybody. It's always difficult to understand other people's vices. Drink, for example—why does anybody want to drink? I know why theoretically, of course. But in practice, by actual experience—no; I just haven't the faintest idea why anybody should wish to narcotize himself with alcohol. And even sex. I've always been much more tempted by power and money. I've had to resist those pretty strenuously. But sensuality was never too difficult.

HUTTON

And, yet, there's nothing you can lose yourself in so completely—nothing that so utterly abolishes your ordinary, every-day, free-will self.

LIBBARD

Nothing except the real thing.

HUTTON

So they say. I've only tried the substitute.

LIBBARD

And that, on your own showing, is a possession by devils. And the devils make you do things that are idiotic and suicidal. In spite of which you go on.

HUTTON

In spite of which and, also, because of which. After all, idiocy's a way of getting out of oneself. So's suicide. Not that I'd care to blow my brains out. But social suicide—

there's something very fascinating about the idea of being ostracized, of being cut off from the group you've always belonged to, of losing one's collective personality and having to start afresh, a naked individual. Alone, on one's own resources. I tell you, it has always fascinated me.

LIBBARD

Is that why you married?

HUTTON

Partly. But there were also other reasons.

LIBBARD

A child?

HUTTON *nods.* LIBBARD *smiles and pats him on the shoulder.*

Thank God! That's the best news you've ever given me. We'll make a human being of you even yet.

HUTTON

Better not mention this to Janet. Not yet awhile.

LIBBARD

Of course not.

A pause.

She seems to have taken the news of your marriage in a very jocular spirit.

HUTTON

A bit too jocular. That's why I'd rather you said nothing about this other thing.

LIBBARD

She'll find out soon enough, of course.

HUTTON

Not as soon as all that. Doris and I are going abroad in a couple of days. I'd meant to do it without letting anyone know. But then this happened and . . . well, I felt I had to tell Janet about our marriage. Otherwise, I'd have kept it quiet for a few months. It would have made things easier. However . . .

He shrugs his shoulders.

Everything, doubtless, is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

JANET *and the* NURSE *re-enter with* GENERAL SPENCE *in his wheel chair.*

LIBBARD

Well, is he dry?

NURSE

Dry as a bone.

GENERAL

You'd think they'd been changing my diapers.

To HUTTON.

Well, I hear you've gone and got married again. Sensible fellow!

HUTTON

Thank you, General.

GENERAL

High time this girl got married, too.

Indicates JANET.

You tell her, Hutton. She won't pay any attention to me. Nobody pays any attention to me.

NURSE

Now, now, don't get so excited.

GENERAL

I will get excited, if I choose. Tell her to think of herself for a change. Tell her to stop this damned self-sacrifice. I'm not worth it. I ought to have been dead ten years ago. Tell her to let me go to blazes and find herself a husband.

JANET

Father, please . . .

GENERAL

Why should I listen to you, if you won't listen to me?

The telephone bell rings.

HUTTON

Excuse me.

He goes and picks up the receiver. He conducts a short conversation of almost inaudible phrases—"Hullo" . . . "Oh, it's you." . . . "I see." . . . "No, stay where you are." . . . "I'll come and fetch you in the car." . . . "Immediately."—*while the others continue their talk.*

JANET

Forcing a laugh and turning to LIBBARD.

"Husbands for husbands' sake." That's father's idea of marriage.

LIBBARD

Wheras yours is husbands for wives' sake. And Hutton's is wives for husbands'. The problem, as always, is to work out a compromise.

GENERAL

Why don't you stick to the point? The point is that she's thirty-six. Soon, there won't be anybody to marry her.

HUTTON *now rejoins the others.*

HUTTON

That was . . . that was my wife calling up. She went to see some friends. And now the roads are like rivers. I've got to go and fetch her.

To JANET.

I'll be back in a few minutes; then I'll take you all over to your house.

JANET

Thank you, Henry. And, meanwhile, I'll have a chance of meeting your sweet little Dora.

HUTTON

Doris.

JANET

Doris—of course. I'm so sorry.

HUTTON *puts on his raincoat, which is lying over a chair, and picks up his hat. He turns to* LIBBARD.

HUTTON

Shall I see you when I get back?

LIBBARD

No, I've taken too much time off already.

To JANET.

I'll be looking in to see your father one day early next week.

JANET

Good.

LIBBARD *waves his hand and follows* HUTTON *out, through the veranda and along the garden path.* JANET *turns to the* GENERAL.

JANET

Well, father . . .

NURSE

Sh-sh! I believe he's dozed off.

They look for a few seconds in silence at the old man, whose chin has dropped on to his chest and who is evidently asleep.

JANET

I'm glad. It's good for him to sleep.

NURSE

It's not my place to say anything; but, if you ask me, I think it's disgusting, all this talk about husbands and things.

JANET

Don't take it too seriously.

NURSE

And not only the talk—the action. How does he have the face to stand there, as though nothing had happened? And all the time he's got that girl round the corner somewhere. A girl that's young enough to be his own daughter. Instead of which. . . . And that poor angel hardly cold in her grave. It makes me sick to think of it.

JANET

He told me he'd known her several months. That means that, even while Emily was alive . . .

NURSE

Didn't I tell you so? You wouldn't believe me; but you see!

JANET

I'm glad poor Emily never knew.

NURSE

I'm not. I wish she'd found him out. I'd have liked to hear her tell him what she thought of him. Pigs—that's what they are, every one of them.

JANET

I don't know how they dare. I'd be so nervous of being caught.

NURSE

You would, yes. But they've got no shame, no decent feelings.

JANET

All the same, it must have come as a great relief to him.

NURSE

You mean, when she died?

JANET

Seeing that he wanted to marry the girl.

NURSE

Who tells you he didn't *have* to marry her?

JANET

You mean, she was . . . ?

NURSE

Nodding emphatically.

I'd be ready to bet on it. He gets her in trouble, and then he has to get her out again.

JANET

And if Emily hadn't died just when she did—what then?

NURSE

Well, it costs a bit of money, of course. But, there's plenty of shady doctors. Not quacks, mind you—real, good doctors. I could tell you a thing or two . . .

JANET

But, luckily, for them she did die. Just at the right time.

The NURSE *looks at her for a moment in silence.*

NURSE

Just at the right time. . . . Miss Spence, you don't suppose . . . ?

She breaks off.

JANET

Suppose what?

NURSE

Why wouldn't he let me take the medicine up to her? He'd never done that before.

JANET

He knew you were in a hurry. I thought it was very nice of him.

NURSE

Nice of him? He never did anything nice for me. I wouldn't have wanted him to, what's more. No, Miss Spence; whatever he did, he did because it suited him. He took that medicine up to her, because he'd got some reason for it.

JANET

You're not suggesting that . . . well, that he put something into it? That's too absurd!

She laughs. The NURSE *does not answer immediately, but goes to the window and looks out.*

NURSE

Do you remember? Standing there in the veranda. It was printed on the label. POISON. CONTAINS ARSENIC.

JANET

What *are* you talking about?

NURSE

Arsenic, arsenic. Brings on vomiting. Something terrible—I've seen it. So *that* was why he made all that fuss about the red currants. Just to give himself an alibi.

JANET

You're mad! It's absolutely ridiculous.

NURSE

You thought it was ridiculous when I told you he was carrying on with a girl. Well, who was right—you or me?

JANET

But, that's different.

NURSE

It starts differently. But, look where it ends. Lies and tricks

and quarrels. And before you know where you are, somebody's asking for a divorce—or else somebody dies. Dies in the nick of time. Dies, just because a man suddenly can't do without sex.

JANET

But, I've known him for years. He couldn't have done anything like that. It's just unthinkable.

NURSE

You've known *a* Mr. Hutton. The one that talks so nicely about art and all that sort of thing. But, you've never known the one that can't keep his hands off girls, the one that'll do anything for the sake of sex. Anything, I tell you, anything.

The GENERAL *stirs and coughs. The* NURSE *goes over to him, takes the handkerchief out of his pocket, wipes his mouth and replaces the handkerchief. She stands for a short time watching him. The old man dozes off again. She turns and comes back to* JANET.

The more I think of it, the worse it looks. Why did it happen on the day I was out?

JANET

What difference did that make?

NURSE

What difference? Why, if I'd been there, he could never have got away with it. I've seen arsenic cases. I'd have recognized the symptoms immediately. So what does he do? Chooses the day when he knows I won't be back till late—

till it's all over, in fact. Then he goes out himself—on the tiles, most likely, with that girl of his.

JANET

He wouldn't have done that!

NURSE

Oh yes, he would! You don't know what they're like. And when he gets home, he turns on me and says I killed her with those red currants. Currants, indeed!

JANET

But, after all, Dr. Libbard thought it was the currants.

NURSE

Yes—and why? Because the other one keeps harping on it. And so I have to take the blame, I'm the scapegoat, I'm the one to be crucified. But, I tell you, I'm not going to put up with it any longer. And it's not merely a question of my own interests. It's a matter of principle. I want to see justice done. I want to have the whole world know the truth.

JANET

You talk as though you knew it yourself.

NURSE

Well, I do.

JANET

You don't. You're just guessing, that's all.

NURSE

I tell you, Miss Spence, I'm as certain about it now as I would be, if they'd already had the autopsy.

JANET

The autopsy?

NURSE

Yes, the autopsy.

JANET

Do you mean to talk to Dr. Libbard?

NURSE

Dr. Libbard? No, of course not. He wouldn't want to admit he'd made a mistake. He'd try to talk me out of it. Besides, all he could do would be to report to the authorities. No, I've got my contacts, I know who to go to.

JANET

And suppose they did find something in the body?

NURSE

They'll ask who put it there. And when they ask that, they'll find there's only one possible answer.

JANET

Only one answer?

NURSE

Yes, and here it is. In person.

Footsteps and voices are heard outside on the veranda. The French window is opened and DORIS *enters, followed by* HUTTON.

HUTTON

If we have much more of this, I shall start building an ark.

He shakes the water from his hat, then leads DORIS *to* JANET.

Well, my dear, this is Doris. As a matter of fact, you've seen her before. Do you remember?

JANET

As she shakes hands with DORIS.

The crippled children!

She laughs.

That *was* a good joke, wasn't it?

DORIS

Overcome by shyness and embarrassment.

Oh, yes . . . yes.

HUTTON

I'm going to abandon you.

He goes over to the suitcase, picks it up and moves to the door.

I'll be back in a moment.

JANET

That's my father there and this is Nurse Braddock.

NURSE

Severely.

How do you do—*Mrs. Hutton.*

JANET

Mrs. Hutton! You know, it seems too ridiculous for an old woman like me to be calling you "Mrs. Hutton." Do you mind if I call you "Doris"?

DORIS

I'd love it.

JANET

And you must call me Janet.

DORIS

Yes, Miss Spence . . . I mean, Janet.

JANET

Isn't she adorable! My dear, what a lovely brooch! Don't I recognize it?

DORIS

Yes, it belonged to . . . to Mrs. Hutton . . . I mean . . . you know.

JANET

Of course! Emily's diamond dragon fly.

To NURSE.

Do you see, Nurse?

NURSE

Bitterly.

I'd noticed it already.

JANET

I remember how much you admired it.

To DORIS.

Nurse Braddock used to look after poor Emily before. . . . before she came to help me with my father. She was really more of a friend than a nurse.

NURSE

It isn't friendship that gets you diamond brooches.

JANET

But, it gets you diamond bracelets all right.

She shows DORIS *her bracelet.*

See what your husband has just given me.

NURSE

He gave you that?

JANET

Just now. Wasn't that sweet of him?

The NURSE *snorts significantly, then crosses over to the* GENERAL, *who has just woken up.*

Aren't you a little jealous?

DORIS

Of course not.

JANET

"Of course not!" You're a real flatterer, aren't you?

She holds the bracelet close to DORIS'S *neck.*

This is how the stones ought to be shown off—against really *young* skin. Skin that's smooth and tight—without a line in it, without a fold or a wrinkle. As though it had been blown up like a balloon.

She pats DORIS'S *cheek.*

Tell me, Doris, are you very, very happy?

DORIS

Yes, I . . . I think so.

JANET

You only think so?

DORIS

No, no, I don't mean *that*!

She is painfully embarrassed.

JANET

I'm sorry. Let's talk about something else, if it upsets you.

DORIS

But I *am* happy. Really and truly. It's just . . . you know, I'm not very clever. And Henry seems to know everything. I'd like to have some lessons, or something—you know, about art and things.

JANET

You sweet child!

DORIS

Then I'd know the difference between things. I mean, some pictures *look* funny; but they aren't meant to *be* funny. You have to know which is which, don't you?

JANET

Well, yes, it's advisable.

DORIS

Perhaps I could take a correspondence course.

The NURSE *wheels* GENERAL SPENCE *into the conversation.*

JANET

Well, father, this is Henry's adorable little wife.

GENERAL

Looking fixedly at DORIS.

Take that ridiculous hat off.

DORIS *does as she is told.*

That's better.

To JANET.

She's the image of your mother, when we were engaged.

JANET

Horrified.

Father!

GENERAL

Same hair, same eyes. But, I'd say the nose was a tiny bit more retroussé. Turn your head.

DORIS *obeys.*

Yes, definitely.

To JANET.

Do you remember that photograph of her in the riding habit? That's the thing she was wearing when I saw her first. Dark green, and she was riding a gray gelding.

To DORIS.

Don't you ever ride in anything but a habit, my dear. No breeches. Women aren't the right shape for breeches. Whereas, in a riding habit—well, a man could still have illusions. And what's life without illusions? Nasty, solitary, brutish and short. And women's legs are shorter even than life.

To HUTTON, *who has re-entered the room during the preceding speech and has now rejoined the group.*

Do you hear that, Hutton? No breeches. If my wife had worn breeches, I'd never have married her. Janet would never have been born? And where should I be then?

HUTTON

Smiling.

Where would any of us be?

With mock gallantry he takes JANET'S *hand and kisses it.*

CURTAIN

Act Two

Scene II

The HUTTONS' *living room. The dust sheets are off the furniture.* DORIS *is lying on the sofa. She wears a negligée and is covered by a blanket. A kewpie doll, a plush teddy bear and a portable phonograph reflect her tastes. As the curtain rises, she is speaking into the telephone.*

DORIS

No, I wasn't there, Aunt Nellie. Henry didn't want me to go. Besides, I've still got a bit of a cold.

Pause.

He isn't back yet. I don't think it'll be over for another hour or so.

Pause.

But, Aunt Nellie, how can you even doubt it? Of course, it'll be all right! Why are they having an inquest at all? Just out of spite—nothing else. They're angry because we didn't wait a year. And then they're all a hundred years old, so they simply hate me.

Pause.

No, she's all right, she's been awfully nice really. And her

father likes me, too. He says I'm like his wife when she was young. He's sweet.

The door opens and JANET *quietly enters.*

JANET

It's only me.

DORIS *beckons to her to come in.*

DORIS

Listen, I've got to ring off now. I'll call you up again later. Good-by, Aunt Nellie.

She hangs up the receiver.

JANET

Gushingly.

Isn't she adorable? Sitting there with all her toys around her, like a dear little girl.

She picks up the teddy bear, lays it in the crook of DORIS's *arm and makes her press it against her bosom.*

Too sweet! And Teddy Bear's your name for Henry, isn't it?

DORIS *looks up at her without a responsive smile.*

DORIS

Janet, you don't look well. What's the matter?

JANET

I'm perfectly all right.

DORIS

Are you still sleeping so badly?

JANET

Oh, that's nothing. And, anyhow, Libbard's promised to give me some kind of a pill. From now on I shall snore.

DORIS

You've been worrying too much, Janet.

JANET

Is that surprising? After all, Henry's a very old friend.

DORIS

I don't worry. I *know* everything's going to be all right.

A pause.

JANET

Have you heard what happened at the inquest?

DORIS

No. Have you?

JANET

Nothing, except that today they were only going to hear the medical evidence.

DORIS

Shuddering.

It's horrible! Digging up somebody after they're dead. And for no reason. Just because there's some spiteful gossip. That beastly nurse of yours! I can't understand why you keep her.

JANET

Now, dear, don't be unreasonable. You know quite well I wanted to send her away; but Henry wouldn't hear of it; nor would Dr. Libbard. Sending her away would have meant that we took her seriously. And that's the last impression we want to give.

DORIS

She ought to be punished—that's what I feel.

JANET

We can think of that later on, when . . . when all this is over.

DORIS

Henry and I are going abroad again next week.

JANET

Oh, you're going abroad again?

DORIS

We were having such a wonderful time in Italy. And then to be called back for this nonsense! And the painters still in the house.

JANET

That's the last straw.

DORIS

We have to have our beds made up here. It's uninhabitable upstairs.

She looks at her watch.

Henry ought to be back pretty soon.

JANET

How was he, when he went off this morning? A bit worried, I suppose.

DORIS

No. He was too angry to be worried. It makes him so furious, the way they're treating him.

JANET

As though he were a member of the unprivileged classes!

Suddenly changing her ironical tone to one of solicitude.

Darling, how dreadfully unkind of me! I quite forgot to ask how you've been. Is everything going as it ought to go?

DORIS

Well, I still feel sick in the morning, if that's what you mean.

JANET

And Libbard's pleased with you, is he?

DORIS

He seems to be.

A pause.

JANET

Reflectively.

It must be a very strange and wonderful thing.

DORIS

You mean, to be going to have a baby?

JANET *nods.*

If you ask my opinion, I think it's awful. Oh, it'll be all right when the baby's actually there. But now . . . I tell you, I'd rather have the measles again. At least it doesn't last so long.

JANET

A few years more, and I shall be too old.

She suddenly bursts out into bitter laughter and indicates her bracelet.

Too old even for this! I don't want to be like one of those old hags one sees at the opera. Covered with diamonds—like Christmas trees. Real diamonds, but false hair, false teeth, false complexion, false breasts.

A pause.

Are you going to nurse your baby yourself?

DORIS

I don't know. I hadn't thought about it.

JANET

I would, if I had one. I wouldn't feel it was really mine, if I didn't.

The door is opened by CLARA, *the parlormaid.*

CLARA

General Spence.

The NURSE *pushes* GENERAL SPENCE *into the room and over to the sofa.*

GENERAL

I didn't want to intrude on you, my dear. But, as you know, I'm in the hands of higher powers.

He indicates the NURSE.

NURSE

I thought Mrs. Hutton would like to know what happened at the inquest.

DORIS

Have you heard?

NURSE

We've just seen Dr. Libbard. He's come straight from the court.

DORIS

Did he say it was all right?

NURSE

Well, it depends on what you call "all right." I don't suppose we all think quite the same.

The GENERAL *lays a hand on* DORIS's *arm.*

GENERAL

My dear, you've got to be brave.

DORIS

But what happened?

GENERAL

That fellow from the Home Office gave his evidence. They found arsenic in the body.

DORIS

Arsenic?

NURSE

To JANET.

Who was right?

DORIS

Arsenic's a poison, isn't it?

GENERAL

Yes, it's a poison.

NURSE

It's got hardly any taste. That's why so many murderers use it.

DORIS *sits in silence, as though turned to stone.*

JANET

I think you'd better go.

NURSE

I certainly don't want to stay in *this* house any longer than I need. Oh, and by the way, Dr. Libbard gave me your prescription.

She puts a small package on the table beside JANET'S *handbag.*

JANET

Thank you.

NURSE

We'll go out through the garden.

GENERAL

Good-by, my dear.

DORIS

Tonelessly.

Good-by.

NURSE

Good-by, *Mrs. Hutton.*

DORIS *does not answer. The* NURSE *wheels the* GENERAL *out through the French window. There is silence.*

JANET

Doris?

DORIS

Without looking at JANET.

What will they do now, Janet?

JANET

Well, the coroner's jury will have to decide how the poison came to be where it was. And then, if somebody's suspected, there'd have to be a trial.

DORIS

Janet, do you think . . . ? I mean, could they do something to him?

JANET

To Henry? But Henry hasn't done anything.

DORIS

No, but suppose he had?

JANET

Doris, you mustn't say those things.

DORIS

But just *suppose*. . . . Then they *could* do something, couldn't they?

JANET

Well, you know what happens to people who . . . who kill someone.

DORIS

Oh, it's too awful.

She covers her face with her hands. JANET *looks at her intently for a moment, then starts to stroke her bare arm.*

JANET

Darling, don't cry. It'll be all right.

DORIS *sharply withdraws her arm.*

DORIS

Don't. Please. Oh . . .

JANET

What's the matter? What have I done?

DORIS

It's nothing to do with you. Please don't be offended. It's just that I hate myself, I hate my body. I don't want to be reminded of it. Oh, I wish he'd never seen me! I wish I were dead!

She sobs. JANET *opens the package brought by the* NURSE *and takes out of it a small bottle containing white tablets. She extracts a tablet, breaks it in half and returns one half to the bottle. Then she takes the pitcher, which is standing on a tray on the table by the sofa, and pours some water into a glass.*

JANET

Take this, dear.

DORIS

I don't want anything.

JANET

It's what Dr. Libbard's given me for sleeping. Half a tablet. Just enough to calm your nerves a little, that's all.

DORIS

Leave me alone. Please.

JANET

Do it for Henry's sake. Think how upset he'll be if he comes home and finds you in this state.

DORIS *uncovers her face and starts to wipe her eyes.*

DORIS

You're quite right. Here, give it to me.

She takes the half tablet, swallows it, then takes a gulp of water from the glass.

Thank you, Janet. You've been an angel.

JANET

You'll feel quieter in a moment, dear.

DORIS

Janet, isn't there anything he could do?

JANET

Well, he's doing it. He's answering their questions; he's explaining why it couldn't be him.

DORIS

But if he can't explain. . . . Couldn't he go away somewhere and hide?

JANET

I suppose he could, if he went far enough.

She rises.

I must get back to my father. He gets so impatient if I'm late for his game of chess.

She kisses DORIS.

Good-by, darling, and don't fret. You'll see—tomorrow it'll all be explained, and then you'll live happily ever after.

She gives DORIS *another kiss, picks up her handbag and goes out.* DORIS *sits in silence for a moment, then sighs, looks at herself in the mirror of her compact and makes up her face. Getting up from the sofa she goes over to where the telephone stands, looks up a number in the London directory and picks up the receiver.*

DORIS

Long distance.

Pause.

I want to put a call through to London. Mayfair five, four three two one.

Pause.

Give me Information.

Pause.

I want to ask about tickets. If I wanted to book two places on a plane, could I do it at the last moment?

Pause.

Where to? Oh, anywhere. I mean, Rome would do. No. Let's say Egypt.

Pause.

Oh, the plane doesn't go every day to Egypt. But it goes to Rome, doesn't it?

Pause.

And you think there might be a chance of getting places even if one didn't reserve them in advance?

Pause.

What time does the plane leave?

Pause.

A.M. or P.M.? From Croydon.

She looks around for a pencil and, finding none, makes notes with her lipstick on a page of the phone book.

Thank you. I'm much obliged.

As she speaks the last words, HUTTON *enters. He goes over to the sofa and sits down heavily, with a sigh of utter weariness, closing his eyes.* DORIS *crosses over to him, kneels down on the sofa beside him and takes his hand.*

DORIS

Darling, are you feeling all right?

HUTTON *nods without speaking.*

I've just heard what happened. Oh, Teddy Bear, it's too terrible!

HUTTON

It's terrible, because it's impossible and yet it's happened.

DORIS

But how . . . ?

HUTTON

Don't ask any questions, darling. Don't let's talk about it. Not now.

He puts his hand to his head.

It's all a confusion. Like a dust storm. No, worse than that. Like being in the middle of a swarm of insects. I just can't think about it any more.

He reaches out a hand to draw her toward him; but DORIS *shrinks back.*

DORIS

Henry, no . . .

He ignores her protest and, putting an arm about her, starts to kiss her throat. She resists for a little; then suddenly takes his head between her hands and kisses him passionately on the mouth. He draws her down and for a long time she lies in the crook of his arm, still and silent, while he caresses her hair and occasionally bends down to kiss her face.

HUTTON

This is impossible, too—impossibly good, for a change—and yet it happens. It's happening now. Impossible, impossible. And it's the same with everything, really. Life's impossible, thought's impossible. How does a piece of matter set about falling in love or writing *Hamlet*? It's just out of the question. And yet, there *Hamlet* is; and there are you, and here am I. Defying time, outside this nightmare of perpetual perishing, beyond evil, beyond good.

He kisses her again, very lightly, then starts to recite.

There is no future, there is no more past,
No roots nor fruits, but momentary flowers;
Lie still, only lie still, and night will last,

Dark and silent, not for a space of hours,
But everlastingly. . . .
There is a long silence.

DORIS

Darling, I never knew you loved me as much as that.

HUTTON

With a tenderly mocking smile.
As much as what? As much as this?
He kisses her on the throat.
Or as this?
He strokes her forehead and hair.
Or as this?
He twists a lock of hair around his fingers and pulls it, gritting his teeth as he does so with an expression of mock savagery. He releases her hair and looks down at her, smiling. DORIS *does not smile back. An expression of distress appears on her face.*

DORIS

Oh, *why* did you do it, Henry? Why *did* you do it?
The question arouses HUTTON'S *anger. He pushes her away from him and gets up.*

HUTTON

You all seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife. First, there's the coroner. Did I put anything into Emily's medicine? Then old Johnson cuts me dead in the street outside the court. And now you. You!

All his pent-up exasperation, fear and bewilderment are turned into a violent and senseless fury against DORIS.

Do I look the sort of person who goes about slaughtering people?

He picks up the kewpie doll.

Wring her neck and get a new one!

He tears the doll's head from its body, throws the dismembered fragments on the floor and gives them a kick.

I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love that I'd do anything to get you—anything, anything. It's about time women realized that men don't go insane about them. All one asks for is a little amusement and a chance to forget oneself, instead of which. . . .

He breaks off, shrugs his shoulders in a gesture of frustration and gives the doll another kick.

I don't know why the devil I ever married you. Why, any man in his right mind ever married any women, for that matter. I need some fresh air; I'm going out.

He moves toward the door.

DORIS

Imploringly.

Teddy Bear!

HUTTON *goes out, slamming the door behind him.*

DORIS

Darling!

She hurries to the door, opens it and looks out. Realiz-

ing that he does not mean to return, she closes it again, goes back to the sofa, sits down on it and covers her face with her hands. After what seems a long time, she looks up, takes the bottle of sleeping tablets on the table which Janet has forgotten, opens it, then hesitates. Finally, she fills a glass with water, shakes several tablets out of the bottle into the palm of her hand, puts them in her mouth and swallows them down with a gulp of water. As she shakes out more tablets from the bottle, the curtain comes down. There is darkness for a few seconds; then the curtain rises on the same scene. DORIS *is lying on the sofa, which has now been made up as a bed.* DR. LIBBARD *is standing in the doorway, drying his hands.*

LIBBARD

Well, that's that, young woman. A day in bed and you can do what you like. And remember, no more of this sort of nonsense.

DORIS

With feeble defiance.

What's to prevent me?

LIBBARD

Nothing—except your own common sense and common decency.

He throws the towel over a chair, then comes toward the sofa.

DORIS

He doesn't love me. I don't want to go on living.

LIBBARD

Who cares about what you want? Who's interested in your beastly little emotions? Why not think of somebody else, for a change?

DORIS

Indignantly.

I think of Henry all the time!

LIBBARD

No, you don't. You think of yourself in relation to Henry. If you thought of Henry, you'd be trying to do something kind and useful—trying to help a man who's in a horribly tight corner. Instead of that, you make a nuisance of yourself by swallowing half a bottle of sleeping tablets. And, remember, if you wake up in the night with cramps in your intestine, don't blame Henry. It's entirely your own fault. Meanwhile, keep this hot water bottle on your stomach.

He lifts the bed clothes and lays a rubber hot water bottle, which he has picked up from the table, on DORIS'S *stomach.*

There!

He readjusts the bed clothes.

Now, what have you got to say for yourself?

DORIS

Speaking after a silence and taking LIBBARD'S *hand.*

I'm sorry, Dr. Libbard. I won't do it again.

LIBBARD *smiles with genuine warmth and tenderness, and pats her hand.*

LIBBARD

Good girl!

DORIS

No, I'm not good. I've done dreadful things. That's why all this is happening.

After a pause, and in a whisper.

You heard what they said at the inquest, did you?

LIBBARD *nods.*

Do you think . . . I mean, is it possible . . .

LIBBARD

No, I feel sure it wasn't Henry—if that's what you mean.

DORIS

Oh, I'm so thankful! But, then who . . . how did it happen?

LIBBARD

It might very easily have been suicide.

DORIS

Do you really think so?

LIBBARD

With a smile.

Well, you tried it, didn't you? I'm very fond of Henry; but I confess I'm glad I'm not married to him.

That isn't fair, Dr. Libbard. It was my fault, not Henry's. After all, why *should* he love me, if he doesn't want to? It's my business to love him. Tell me how I can help him, Dr. Libbard.

LIBBARD

Well, first of all, you've got to believe in him—through thick and thin and in spite of everything.

DORIS

Doubtfully

In spite of everything?

LIBBARD

Nodding.

Other people may not think as you and I do.

DORIS

Oh.

LIBBARD

It's always well to be prepared for the worst.

DORIS

Yes, I suppose so.

LIBBARD

That's the first thing. And then, whatever happens, you've got to be strong and calm. No tears, no harrowing scenes. They're just an indulgence, that's all. Some women cry as

easily as pigs grunt, and they enjoy it very nearly as much. So don't do it. Don't do it! And finally, remember you're going to have a baby. That'll probably be about the best thing that ever happened to Henry. So, for goodness' sake, don't let's make a mess of it.

The door opens quietly and HUTTON *looks into the room.* LIBBARD *beckons to him, then turns to* DORIS.

See who's here!

DORIS *turns her head and catches sight of* HUTTON.

DORIS

Oh, darling.

HUTTON

They told me when I came in. . . . Is she all right?

LIBBARD

Flourishing! And there's never going to be any nonsense of this kind again—is there, Doris?

DORIS *smiles and shakes her head.* LIBBARD *rises and starts to pack his bag.*

How wonderful it would be if we were all disembodied spirits! Then there wouldn't have to be any doctors—only psychoanalysts at five guineas an hour. Well, good night, my child.

He pats DORIS's *arm, then moves toward the door, accompanied by* HUTTON.

HUTTON

I'm so thankful you got here in time.

LIBBARD

But wouldn't it have been still better if there'd been no need for me to come? You're not a bad man, Henry; but you have the fatal gift of being able to make things bad for other people. They come in contact with you, and then they either do something evil or suffer something evil. It's because you've never committed yourself to anything. All you've wanted was that other people should commit themselves while you looked on and were amused. But, unfortunately, other people don't enjoy being treated as a source of entertainment. Particularly women. The way they react to that kind of treatment isn't at all amusing. Good night, Henry; and if it's any comfort to you, I *don't* draw the obvious conclusions from the medical evidence.

HUTTON

Thank you.

They shake hands. LIBBARD *goes out.* HUTTON *crosses over to the bed, kneels down beside it and takes* DORIS'S *hand.*

Can you forgive me, Doris?

DORIS

DORIS *strokes his hair.*

Pause.

Darling . . . I'm the one who needs to be forgiven. It was all selfishness really. I see it now—I was just trying to spite you, trying to get my own back.

HUTTON

I began it, I'm afraid.

DORIS

But *I* ought to have known better.

HUTTON

Smiling.

At eighteen?

DORIS

This is something where it doesn't make any difference how old you are. It's just a question of . . . well, of being a girl. No I hate that word; it's all wrong. Why can't women call themselves women? Why do they have to pretend they're like those faces in the movies? You know—always looking at men out of the corners of their eyes, and their mouths all painted up like an advertisement in neon lights. I do it myself, of course. Why?—I don't know.

She looks at him tenderly; then suddenly ruffles his hair and utters a little laugh.

But, of course, it isn't any different, Teddy Bear. I love you just as much in *that* way. Only now, there's something else. Do you know what I mean?

HUTTON

Yes, I know what you mean.

DORIS

After a pause, with sudden emphasis.

And to think I tried to kill myself! And everything's so beautiful. So . . . so mysterious.

She looks around the room.

Even that fly on the ceiling. Even that silly old doll.

She moves her hand back and forth.

And this—how wonderful this is! Simply being able to move from one place to another. It's empty here, it's empty there. That's why you're free. Perhaps that's what God is—the emptiness between things. Free! Free!

She moves her hand to various positions in space. Then she lowers it on to the bed table.

And then not free!

She touches her own breast.

Not free. Just think if there were no emptiness, if everything were jam full, so that you couldn't move—like . . . like a coffin. That's death, that's hell.

A silence.

Darling, let's call him Patrick.

HUTTON

Call whom?

DORIS

I mean . . . if it's a boy.

HUTTON

Oh, I see! Well, I'm not an Irishman; but I don't have any objection to Patrick. And if it's a girl?

DORIS

Well, what about Belinda?

HUTTON

No, there I draw the line.

DORIS

But, it's such a pretty name.

HUTTON

Do you see me running after the child in Kensington Gardens and yelling, "Belinda, Belinda"?

DORIS

You'd look silly whatever her name was. Any man looks silly, when he's trying to keep a tiny child in order.

HUTTON

But I'd rather not look sillier than necessary.

DORIS

All right, then; we'll call her something else. Oh, Teddy Bear, it's going to be so wonderful! They'll go to school and they'll grow up, and they'll marry, and then there'll be grandchildren. . . .

HUTTON

And, meanwhile, there'll have been two or three more world wars and half a dozen slumps and revolutions. But, fortunately, private life will still go on, as it always has done, in spite of everything the benefactors of humanity can do to us. The great men are acclaimed and then hated; the empires rise and fall; the religions flourish, decay and stink; the ideologies come into fashion and go out again. But the business of eating and drinking and talking and loving—it's still the only thing that really matters. It isn't

progress or evolution that can make people happy; it isn't Marx or Abraham Lincoln. It's sitting on the grass and looking at the sunset and, maybe, surreptitiously picking one's nose.

DORIS

They shall not pick their noses!

HUTTON

That's what *you* say. But, just wait and see. Even Belinda will do it. Even Isolde. Even Melisande.

DORIS

Stop it!

She puts her hand over his mouth. Suddenly, her expression changes.

Henry, we've forgotten. We're just shutting our eyes and pretending.

She covers her face with her hands for a moment, then turns to him again.

Listen. Just before you came back from the court I rang up Overseas Airways. They say that, with luck, you can get seats at the last moment. I'm well enough. I could get up now if I had to. There's a plane leaving Croydon in the morning quite early. And this is Friday, there's the whole weekend in front of us. We could be in Africa before they found out. Or in Turkey—or . . .

Looking angry, HENRY *starts to rise from his knees. She lays a restraining hand on his shoulder.*

Teddy Bear!

He pushes her hand away, gets up and starts to walk about the room.

HUTTON

Who put this idiotic idea into your head?

DORIS

Oh . . . you don't think it's a good plan?

HUTTON

Sarcastically.

Excellent, if you want to get me tried for murder. Can't you see—it would be simply asking them to arrest me?

DORIS

I hadn't thought of that.

HUTTON

Of course not—because you still believe I did it.

DORIS

But I don't, I don't.

HUTTON

Then why do you suggest that I should run away?

DORIS

Well, I thought it would be safer. I mean, just in case they didn't understand. In case you couldn't make them believe.

She bursts into tears.

Oh, I've been a fool again. I've made you angry. It's only because I love you so much . . . because I was so terribly anxious . . .

HUTTON *relents, goes over to her and, smiling, strokes her hair.*

HUTTON

I love my love with an L, because she is so logical.

He takes out his handkerchief and wipes her eyes.

So lamentable at the same time and so lachrymose.

He puts his handkerchief away, holds her face between his hands and looks down at her.

Not to mention so little, so light, so lithe, so lovely.

DORIS

Darling . . .

HUTTON

And so ludicrous.

He taps her on the nose. . . . There is a knock at the door. He straightens himself up.

Come in.

CLARA *enters.*

CLARA

It's Miss Spence, sir. She says she doesn't want to disturb you; but she forgot something when she was here this afternoon.

HUTTON

To DORIS.

Is it all right?

DORIS *nods. He turns back to* CLARA.

Ask her to come in.

CLARA *goes out.*

What did she forget?

DORIS

I'm ashamed to say.

She points at the bottle of sleeping tablets.

HUTTON

Oh, that!

He puts the bottle back into its cardboard package.

Well, in a certain sense, I'm glad she left it. Aren't you?

DORIS *takes his hand and kisses it.* JANET *enters and hurries over to the sofa.*

JANET

Darling, I've just heard from Clara . . . Oh, it's too awful.

DORIS

I'm quite all right, Janet. Really.

JANET

To HUTTON.

Is that true, Henry?

HUTTON

Libbard got here almost immediately. There's no harm done.

JANET

Thank God! You know, I feel so guilty. If I'd been less absent-minded . . .

She indicates the bottle of sleeping tablets.

HUTTON

We're grateful to you that you weren't.

JANET

Grateful?

HUTTON

Of course, it was a pretty dangerous operation. But, it's turned out to be entirely successful. Hasn't it, darling?

DORIS *nods and smiles up at him tenderly. There is a long silence.*

JANET

Forcing a little laugh.

Well, I'd better take my property and go. Two's company, Three's none.

She kisses DORIS.

Good-by, darling. I know you'll be glad to get rid of me.

DORIS

No, I won't, Janet.

JANET

You little liar!

She shakes her finger playfully at DORIS, *then picks*

up the bottle of sleeping tablets and starts toward the door, which HUTTON *opens for her. On the threshold she halts and turns to* HUTTON.

I think I ought to tell you, Henry. I met the vicar just now and then Mr. Johnson joined us. They said the most terrible things.

HUTTON

About me?

JANET

Nodding.

Really dreadful.

HUTTON

Well, I suppose it's only to be expected.

JANET

I told them they had no right even to think that way, much less to talk. After all, it could have been an accident, it could have been suicide.

HUTTON

Well, it certainly wasn't what they think. So, there's no alternative. Either accident or suicide.

A pause.

Poor Emily—she was always saying she was tired of life. I used to think it was just a figure of speech. I suppose I didn't *want* to know how unhappy she was.

He lowers his voice.

I keep wondering if she hadn't heard something about . . . about Doris.

JANET

Yes, it's quite possible.

HUTTON

Perhaps that was what drove her to it. God, what one does to people!

JANET

Slowly, after a pause.

Yes, what one does to people . . . ! Well. . . .

She passes through the door and HUTTON *follows.*

CURTAIN

Act Three

Scene I

The stage is divided, unequally, between HUTTON'S *cell, on the left, and the Spences' drawing room, on the right. When the one is illumined, the other is in darkness, invisible and nonexistent. Stone-floored, white-walled, the cell contains only a narrow bed, a chair, a table. On the other side of the partition, the* SPENCES' *drawing room is a nondescript room in a nineteenth-century house of indeterminate style. There is a fireplace in the center of the wall of partition, to the left; a door in the back wall; and, on the right, windows and a glass door giving on to a terrace. The furniture is old, comfortable, rather shabby.* GENERAL SPENCE'S *travels have left their mark on the room in the form of Indian hangings, panoplies of oriental arms, a gilded wooden Buddha, a dancing Krishna in bronze, a statuette of Kali.*

When the curtain rises, only the cell is illuminated. HUTTON *is seen, walking up and down like a caged animal. The prison clock strikes the half-hour. He starts, pauses long enough to look at the position of the sun through his narrow window, then once more starts to walk up and down. The light goes out and immediately comes on again in the right hand half of the stage.*

Looking ill and haggard, JANET *is seated in an armchair in front of the fireplace. She keeps fingering her bracelet. The door opens and* GENERAL SPENCE *is wheeled into the room by the* NURSE. *They are dressed for going out—warmly dressed, for the season is late autumn. The* GENERAL *holds a bag of dog biscuits on his knee.*

NURSE

Well, here we are, dear! You're sure you won't change your mind and come with us?

JANET

No.

She speaks in a strange flat monotone.

GENERAL

Going to start by feeding the dogs. Does you good to be with dogs for a change. Takes your mind off your troubles.

JANET *suddenly laughs.*

Wouldn't have minded being a dog myself. Comfortable kennel. Free meals. Unlimited access to the females of the species. And when you're old, they shoot you. No wheel chairs, no torture, no damned nurses. Just a bang, and it's all over.

He laughs; but his effort to make JANET *smile is unavailing. She continues to finger her bracelet. He lays a hand on her arm.*

Put on your things and come with us. Do.

JANET

No, father, I'd rather not.

NURSE

It would help you to sleep, if you took some exercise.

JANET

Please!

NURSE

A good brisk walk—that's what you need, dear. And then five minutes of deep breathing. I'm a great believer in deep breathing. That and abdominal massage. Up the ascending colon, then across, then down. Up, across, and then down. Forty or fifty times. I used to do it for Mrs. Hutton. Every single day.

She sighs and shakes her head.

Poor thing, poor thing! Well, she'll sleep easier in her grave after next Friday. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord—and that's the truth, as he'll find out when they put the noose round his neck and spring the trap.

JANET, *meanwhile, has risen, crossed over to the French window and is undoing the catch.*

I can hardly wait.

JANET

Holding the glass door open and pointing out.

Hurry up! Quick!

Her tone is peremptory. The NURSE *looks at her in surprise and with a certain apprehension.*

NURSE

Oh, all right, all right.

To the GENERAL.

Got your bag of biscuits?

She pulls his deerstalker hat farther down over his ears, then starts toward the French window.

Well, we'll be back for tea.

The GENERAL *takes* JANET'S *hand and pats it, smiling up at her with solicitous tenderness.*

GENERAL

Don't let it get you down.

JANET *says nothing and withdraws her hand. The* NURSE *wheels the chair out through the French window and across the terrace.* JANET *closes the glass door after them and stands staring out into the garden. The door in the back wall is opened and a maid appears.*

MAID

Dr. Libbard, miss.

LIBBARD *enters, carrying his professional black bag.*

LIBBARD

As he shakes hands.

I was driving past the house. Thought I'd just drop in to see how things were going.

JANET

Father seems quite well. He's just gone out for his walk.

LIBBARD

And you?

He looks at her closely.

H'm. Not much of a credit to your physician, I'm afraid.

JANET

After a silence.

If I don't sleep tonight, I shall go mad.

LIBBARD

You've still got some of that stuff I gave you, haven't you?

JANET

It doesn't seem to work any more. I get the most awful dreams and wake up again. Couldn't you give me something that would simply *make* me sleep?

LIBBARD

I *could*. But I'd much rather not.

JANET

Her flat voice breaking.

You don't know what it's like, Dr. Libbard. Night after night . . . I can't stand it any longer.

LIBBARD

Any fool can stop the symptoms of insomnia. The difficulty is to find the cause—to find it, and then to remove it.

JANET

After a silence.

Well, it's going to be removed—next Friday.

LIBBARD

Next Friday? Oh, I see. Do you hate him as much as all that?

JANET

After all, it was proved, wasn't it? They proved that he killed her. How do you expect me not to hate him? Emily was . . . was my best friend.

LIBBARD

Of course, if you cared so much for Emily, that would account for everything. Grieving over the death of your friend. And what a death!

A silence.

JANET

I keep thinking of that awful night.

LIBBARD

Sometimes it seems so easy to die. And then in other cases it's horribly difficult. Difficult for the mind as well as the body.

JANET

Yes, the fear—I believe that was worse than the pain. And, it was all *his* doing! I tell you, I hate him.

LIBBARD

You used to be such good friends.

JANET

Never! I always felt there was something wrong somewhere. Perhaps it was the way he treated poor Emily. He was really cruel. I couldn't bear it.

LIBBARD

I don't think Emily can have realized what you felt about him. She thought that, if she died, you and he ought to get married.

JANET

Married? But, that's monstrous! How dare you?

LIBBARD

I'm only repeating what she said.

JANET

With mounting fury.

Talking about me as though I were one of those women of his, as though I were the kind of slut that will tumble into bed with any man that comes along! It's disgusting. It's . . . it's obscene.

LIBBARD

I don't know what's so obscene about marriage.

JANET

I won't have it!

LIBBARD

Suddenly professional.

Excuse me.

He takes a flashlight out of his pocket.

Hold still for a moment, please.

He pulls up first one eyelid, then the other, and flashes light into the eyes, peering intently at the iris as he does so. He hums to himself.

Yes, yes. . . .

He returns the flashlight to his pocket.

Getting excited doesn't help you to sleep, does it?

He feels her pulse. JANET, *who has recovered her self-control, answers in a normal voice.*

JANET

I'm sorry, Dr. Libbard.

LIBBARD

Don't apologize to me. Apologize to yourself. After all, you're the one who has insomnia. And I'll tell you of another who hasn't been sleeping properly; that's the one he actually did marry.

JANET

After a pause.

Do you ever think of that unfortunate child?

LIBBARD

Hutton's child?

JANET

Nodding.

Imagine what'll happen to it at school. "What does your father do?" "Oh, my father's a murderer. He was hanged at Wandsworth Prison."

She utters a short laugh, then checks herself and resumes in a tone of solicitude.

I really hate to think about it. Don't you?

LIBBARD

Well, first of all, I don't think about it. And, second, if I did think about it, I shouldn't hate thinking about it. Nor, for that matter, would I get any satisfaction out of it.

JANET

You don't think *I* get any satisfaction out of it? I think it's going to be something tragic, something really terrible.

LIBBARD

It's difficult to cure stomach ulcers; but it's wonderfully easy to produce them. All you've got to do is to think about the future. Nobody knows what's going to happen to that child. The only thing we can be at all sure of is that, if it has any sense or guts, it'll be all right—even if its circumstances are all wrong.

JANET

It's no joke to be the child of a criminal.

LIBBARD

It's no joke to be anybody's child; it's no joke to be born.

And, anyhow, I'm still not convinced that Hutton is a criminal.

JANET

You mean, you don't think he was guilty? After all that came out at the trial? How can you say such a thing?

LIBBARD

I've just been reading a very interesting book. It's an analysis of well-known cases of people who were condemned for crimes they never committed.

JANET

But they *proved* it!

LIBBARD

They proved it in these other cases too. Sometimes it was nothing but the circumstantial evidence. It piled up; it all pointed in one direction; the conclusion was obvious and inescapable. And, yet, that conclusion was wrong. But, it's rare when that happens. More often it's a combination of misleading circumstantial evidence and deliberate false witness.

JANET

Do you mean that somebody was telling lies?

LIBBARD

I don't know. I just can't believe that Hutton was responsible.

JANET

Then . . . then who was?

LIBBARD

What about Emily herself?

JANET

Suicide? No, Emily wouldn't have committed suicide. She wasn't that sort of person.

LIBBARD

Yes, I must say, I was a bit surprised when you said that at the trial. She often talked to me about being tired of life —wanting to put an end to it all.

JANET

I never heard her say anything of the kind. Never.

LIBBARD

Nor did Nurse Braddock, if I remember rightly.

JANET

I don't know what she said. And I don't care.

LIBBARD

Hutton cared all right. It carried a lot of weight with the jury. Somebody who'd been with Emily, day and night, for the best part of two years. And she says she's never heard so much as a whisper of suicide. And suicide was the main line of defense.

JANET

I'm not interested in lines of defense. I'm interested in the truth. I'm interested in justice.

Her voice rises, as she speaks, till it almost goes out of control.

And if you're trying to insinuate things . . . if you're accusing me of telling lies, just because I hated that beast . . .

She suddenly checks herself.

Why do you let me go on like this? Why don't you stop me?

LIBBARD

People don't like being stopped as a rule.

JANET

I don't really mean it. It's just that I get worked up and then it seems to go on by itself. Do you know that awful feeling? As though you were a violin, and somebody were screwing up the strings—tighter and tighter. And everything goes out of tune; and the slightest thing makes them vibrate; and one day they'll break. Oh, God, I wish it were all over!

LIBBARD

All over? You seem to think this business is like something in the movies, or in a novel—you seem to think it has an ending. At eight o'clock next Friday morning, to be precise. But that won't be the finish.

JANET

What do you mean?

LIBBARD

Surely, it's obvious. In real life there aren't any endings. Only transitions, only a succession of new beginnings. Hutton's going to be hanged. But don't imagine you're going to be free of him. In one way or another this thing is going on. All you can do is to decide whether it shall go on in the worst possible way, or in some other way.

JANET

What other way?

LIBBARD

You're the only one who can answer that question. All *I* know is that the way that's being followed now is the worst way. You can't sleep. And Hutton's going to be hanged for something he never did.

JANET

But it was proved.

LIBBARD

Not to my satisfaction.

JANET

It's nonsense to say it was suicide. Nurse Braddock never heard her say anything, I never heard her say anything. How could it have been?

LIBBARD

Very well, let's assume you're right.

JANET

I know I'm right.

LIBBARD

You know it wasn't Emily and I know it wasn't Hutton. Well, then, it must have come through some other agency. And if you ask me what other agency, I'll answer as I did before.

JANET

I don't know what you're driving at.

LIBBARD

I'm driving at some way to make you sleep.

A pause.

Of course, you know the basic reason why poor Emily was so dreadfully unhappy?

JANET

What was that?

LIBBARD

It was because she wouldn't accept the facts as she found them. She was an invalid and she'd lost her looks. But she wanted people to treat her as though she were young and pretty. Hence all the misery.

A pause.

JANET

What has that got to do with me?

LIBBARD

That's for you to say. I'm just pointing out that people can come to terms with even the most terrible facts.

JANET

Those are just words, that's all.

LIBBARD

No, they're more than that. I've known plenty of people who came to terms with death—even with pain, which is a good deal worse.

JANET

But nobody's ashamed of dying, nobody feels that it's wrong to suffer. You don't despise a woman because she's got cancer.

LIBBARD

That's true. But there are also people who manage to come to terms with ruin and poverty. And I've known one or two who came to terms even with being criminals, even with the consequences of being criminals. They started afresh on that basis, they made the best of the actual facts.

JANET

After a silence.

Do you suppose Henry has come to terms with . . . with what's happening to him?

LIBBARD

I know he hasn't.

JANET

Up till now he's always been able to buy his way out of any trouble he got into. Not this time.

LIBBARD

And that's why it's so hard for him. That's why it would be so hard for any of us. We've lived behind plate glass. We can see the unpleasant side of life, but we're not touched by it. We're protected by the wall of money and privilege. It's transparent, but it's strong. We feel safe. But sometimes the glass gets broken and then we're appalled by what comes through, we're overwhelmed. And yet, it's always in our power to come to terms with the thing. And the quicker we come to terms, the better.

JANET

The better for whom?

LIBBARD

For everybody concerned. And, especially ourselves, Janet.

There is a long silence. JANET *keeps turning the bracelet on her wrist. She looks up at last with a smile, and the tone in which she speaks is deliberately offhand and detached.*

JANET

Well, we've had a very interesting talk, Dr. Libbard. Now,

what about those sleeping tablets? Were you going to give me something a little stronger than you did last time?

LIBBARD *looks at her for a moment, then shakes his head and sighs.*

LIBBARD

Well, if that's what you really want, I suppose you'd better have it.

He gets up, goes to the writing desk, takes out his prescription pad and starts to write. Then he interrupts himself and turns again to JANET.

Janet, do you remember that young Dr. Farjeon you met at my house last year?

JANET

Yes.

LIBBARD

I've known him ever since he was a boy. A very nice fellow —kind, sensible, conscientious. And now he's turned out to be a first-rate psychiatrist.

JANET

No, thanks. I don't want to go to a psychiatrist.

LIBBARD

But you want to get well, don't you?

JANET

I'm not ill—not that way, anyhow.

With sudden violence.

You're plotting to get me locked up. Then I'll be at your mercy. You'll try to worm things out of me. You'll tell them to torture me.

LIBBARD

Now, Janet, don't talk nonsense.

JANET

But it's true. Otherwise you wouldn't be trying to send me to a doctor for mad people. I tell you, there's nothing wrong with me. I just can't sleep, that's all.

LIBBARD

And that's why I suggested your going to see Farjeon. He can put you to sleep, if you want him to.

JANET

Horrified.

Do you mean, he'll hypnotize me?

LIBBARD

Well, what's so alarming about that?

JANET

Send me to sleep and then make me say all sorts of things I don't want to say—and I shan't know I've said them. No, no, I won't.

She jumps up and walks agitatedly about the room.

I know what you're up to, you and your hypnotist!

LIBBARD *rises and moves toward her.*

LIBBARD

Listen, Janet. Be reasonable. . . .

JANET

Don't touch me! I'm not a fool. I can see what you're trying to do.

LIBBARD

Janet . . .

He lays a hand on her arm. She turns and savagely strikes at his wrist.

JANET

I'll kill you! Do you understand?

There is a silence. Then LIBBARD *shrugs his shoulders and goes back to the writing desk.*

LIBBARD

Well, I suppose I'd better give you those tablets after all.

He starts to write again. The door opens and a maid enters. She crosses over to JANET, *who has gone to stand near a window and is staring out, nervously playing with her bracelet as she does so. The maid says something in an undertone.* JANET *nods.*

JANET

All right. Show her in.

The maid goes out and, a few seconds later, ushers DORIS *into the room.* DORIS *is dressed in her outdoor clothes and her fur coat conceals the fact that she*

is already far gone in pregnancy. Her face is very pale and she has evidently been crying. LIBBARD *looks up as she enters.*

LIBBARD

You?

He tears off the prescription form and leaves it on the desk, then rises to shake hands with DORIS.

Have you been all right?

DORIS *nods, then moves toward Janet.*

DORIS

I . . . I hope you don't mind my coming, Janet.

JANET

Without turning round.

Not a bit. I'm delighted.

Puzzled by this odd reception, DORIS *looks inquiringly at* LIBBARD, *who takes her arm and leads her away.*

LIBBARD

You went to see him today, didn't you?

DORIS

Yes, I went this morning.

A pause.

Oh, Dr. Libbard, it was so terrible.

She starts to cry.

His hands were all bleeding.

LIBBARD

Bleeding?

DORIS

From beating on the door. He wants them to let him talk to the governor of the prison. As if that would do any good. How can they do it, Dr. Libbard? How can they kill a man who isn't guilty? You don't believe he's guilty, do you?

LIBBARD

You know I don't.

DORIS

And, meanwhile, they torture him. They keep him locked up there. They tell him when it's going to happen. And that awful clock keeps striking and striking till he's ready to go mad.

She sobs. LIBBARD *pats her shoulder.* JANET *quietly approaches and stands listening.*

LIBBARD

There, you can cry now. But I hope you didn't do it when you were with him.

DORIS

No, I remembered what you said. I did my best not to show what I was feeling. But I don't think it made any difference to him. I don't think anything would make any difference to him now. He can't think of anything but . . .

but what's going to happen to him. Everything else is meaningless; it just doesn't exist. Even me, even the baby. And yet, before the appeal was rejected, he cared so much. It was so wonderful—as though we'd never loved one another before. And now it's all gone. There's nothing left except the clock and this awful thing that's coming nearer and nearer.

JANET

Nearer. Yes, it's coming nearer every second.

DORIS *turns to her.*

DORIS

Janet, I know you think he's guilty.

JANET

They proved it, didn't they?

DORIS

They proved it. And yet I swear he didn't do it. I *know* he didn't.

JANET

How do you expect me to go against the evidence?

DORIS

That's just what I came to talk to you about, Janet. You used to be his friend. You could still help him.

JANET

Me?

DORIS

For old time's sake.

JANET

What's that got to do with the evidence?

DORIS

If you could just go and tell them it was a mistake.

JANET

A mistake? What was a mistake?

DORIS

About her never saying that she wanted to kill herself. If you told them you hadn't really meant it . . .

JANET

I did mean it. It's absolutely true.

DORIS

But, Janet . . .

JANET

I don't care what other people say. I, personally, never heard her talk that way. Never.

DORIS

But if other people heard her, then it means that it's true. So, it wouldn't be a lie. You could go and tell them that,

after all, she did talk about it. They'd believe you, Janet. They'd do something. They might put it off. . . . even now. Oh, Janet, please, please!

She takes JANET'S *hand and kisses it.* JANET *snatches her hand away.*

JANET

How dare you?

DORIS

Oh. . . . I'm sorry.

JANET

She rubs her hand where DORIS *had kissed it.*

It makes me sick to think of it. All that pawing and slobbering. Like dogs, like monkeys. And then calling it love. And you dare to kiss me. With that same mouth . . .

She shudders.

And now he sends you to come and whine for mercy.

DORIS

He didn't send me. I came on my own.

JANET

Oh, she came on her own, did she? His whore, the little five-shilling whore he lost his head about. The sweet little baby whore who doesn't know anything about art or literature. But she knows a great deal about certain other things. Everything there is to be known. Kissing and . . .

LIBBARD

Now, Janet, that's enough.

JANET

That's it! Stand up for her. Just because of her skin. Nice, isn't it? You'd like to do a little pawing and slobbering yourself, wouldn't you?

She turns to DORIS.

And, meanwhile, I'm to go and say I told a lie. So that you can go on with your filthy love making.

DORIS

Janet, how can you?

JANET

Yes, how can I? It's unforgivable to say such things, isn't it? Nobody cares about doing. But saying, saying—that's always unforgivable. How old were you when you first started doing things? Eighteen. Or perhaps Henry wasn't the first? Seventeen, then, sixteen. You couldn't wait. You never even gave yourself a chance to find out what real love was like. Pawing and slobbering—that's all you cared about. And you think that's love? You want me to help you to have more of it. And then, as a reward, I'll be asked to be the baby's godmother. The child of a criminal, the child of a man who's been hanged. Because that's what he's going to be—hanged, hanged by the neck until he is dead. And now go, go, go!

She strikes at DORIS. *The first blow takes effect, but* LIBBARD *is in time to catch her arm before the second*

reaches its mark. JANET *stands for a moment staring at him malevolently. . . . Then, suddenly, she covers her face with her hands, turns away and runs out of the room. The light goes out and comes on in the other half of the stage.*

Act Three

Scene II

In his cell, HUTTON *is lying face downward on the bed. After a long silence, heavy footsteps are heard approaching along the corridor; they halt outside the door. The cover of the spy hole is rattled, indicating that someone is looking into the cell.* HUTTON *sits up to listen, then hurries to the door. As he does so, the cover of the spy hole is replaced.*

HUTTON

Listen. For God's sake! I tell you, I'm innocent. I didn't do it. I swear I didn't. Let me talk to the governor. Just for five minutes. I can explain everything. Please, please. He'll understand, if only you'll let me talk to him. It's all a mistake.

The footsteps start to move away again; and as the sound diminishes, HUTTON'S *voice rises in pitch and intensity, until he is almost screaming.*

No, don't go! I beg you. It's not right. It isn't justice. You can't let an innocent man be killed. Stop—for God's sake! Come back!

He pauses to listen.

Come back!

There is complete silence. He raises his hands to rest on the door; then lets them drop with a gesture of despair. He turns and sits down on the edge of the bed and covers his face with his hands. The cell door is quietly opened and a warder enters, followed by LIBBARD. *The warder remains standing near the door.* LIBBARD *crosses over to the bed and lays a hand on* HUTTON'S *shoulder.* HUTTON *starts painfully and looks up.*

HUTTON

Oh. . . .

He sees who it is and seizes LIBBARD'S *hand.*

Help me, Libbard, help me. For God's sake!

LIBBARD

I can only help you against yourself.

HUTTON

What do you mean?

LIBBARD

I can prevent you from torturing yourself, that's all.

HUTTON

But, Libbard, it's only two days now. Less than two days. Only a little more than forty hours. Forty hours. . . .

LIBBARD

Well, that's time enough to be reconciled, time enough to come to terms with the facts. Look at your hands.

HUTTON'S *hands are still clutched around* LIBBARD'S *arm.*

That's how you're holding on to yourself. And the tighter you hold, the more it hurts. Now, loosen your fingers! Loosen them!

HUTTON *obeys.*

Good. Now, let your hands drop on to your knees. Let them fall as though they didn't belong to you.

HUTTON *allows his hands to fall palm upward into his lap.*

There, that's better! I've been trying to cure sick people for the last thirty-odd years and, I can tell you, most illnesses come from not being able to let go.

HUTTON

But I'm not ill. I'm well. I'm perfectly well. And in two days they're going to kill me, they're going to . . .

LIBBARD

Listen to yourself! Do you think a man who talks like that is perfectly well?

As he speaks the clock strikes the three-quarters. HUTTON *covers his face with his hands.*

HUTTON

That clock!

LIBBARD

Yes, the hands move forward; and the earth turns away from the sun; and soon the night will come, and then the

morning, and then another night—and another morning. And there's nothing anybody can do about it. Nothing whatever. Well, is that any reason for turning the last two days of your life into a hell of fear and bitterness and resentment? Let go, I tell you, let go!

There is a long silence.

HUTTON

You've seen a lot of people die, haven't you?

LIBBARD

A great many.

HUTTON

Is it . . . is it very bad?

LIBBARD

The bad time is before—and it's bad only for the people who won't accept what's happening to them. They resist, they hold on. But the whole force of destiny is pushing them. All the screaming and struggling and hanging on—it's all perfectly useless. They just suffer a great deal unnecessarily—that's all.

HUTTON

Slowly.

Yes, I see. . . .

LIBBARD

It's a question of accepting what can't be avoided or

escaped. And not only accepting it; actually willing it. "This is the inevitable, this is my destiny; and I *will* that it shall be exactly as it is." And when you say that, your destiny is right and good—however cruel it may have seemed to you before. The inevitable becomes the tolerable and even, in a certain sense, the reasonable.

HUTTON

Reasonable?

LIBBARD

Yes, even this nightmare that you've had to live through. Even this . . .

HUTTON

Libbard, I didn't do it. Do you believe me?

LIBBARD

I believe you.

HUTTON

And you still think that what's happened is reasonable?

LIBBARD

Not by our everyday standards. But when the thing can be accepted and willed, then there are other standards.

HUTTON

Do *you* accept it and will it?

LIBBARD

No, of course not. I can't accept a wrong which is being done to someone else, just as I can't accept to do wrong myself. In both cases I've got to do everything in my power to right the wrong. But a wrong that's inflicted on me, an evil that I suffer—those I *can* accept. And if I do accept them, if I go further and actually will them, then the wrong and the evil change their nature—change it so far as *I'm* concerned. Not so far as anyone else is concerned.

HUTTON

You mean, even injustice can become justice.

LIBBARD

For the victim. Not for the judge or the spectator.

HUTTON

Of course, in a way all this isn't entirely unjust. I didn't kill Emily—but I certainly tortured her. I knew how unhappy she was and I accepted her suffering, I willed it. And I went on willing it, because I wasn't prepared to forgo my amusements. It's terrible what monstrous things one's ready to do, just to amuse oneself. It all seemed so trivial and excusable at the time. But now, now I know better—and it's too late.

LIBBARD

It's never too late to recognize the truth.

HUTTON

After a pause.

Do you think we all get what we deserve?

LIBBARD

What else do we get? God is not mocked: as a man sows, so shall he reap.

HUTTON

And yet I don't believe I'm any worse than plenty of other men I know. And what are *they* doing at this moment? Shooting pheasants, or telephoning to their stockbrokers, or dozing in an armchair at the club.

LIBBARD

You're talking like the Book of Job. As though good men ought always to be rich and healthy, and bad men always poor and covered with carbuncles. But that's just childish. Shooting pheasants and telephoning to one's stockbroker aren't necessarily the rewards of virtue. On the contrary, they may be punishments. After all, a man who spends his time on that sort of thing isn't spending it on anything else. Which means that he's some sort of a spiritual abortion. And being an abortion, when you might be a fully developed human being—what's that but the most terrible of punishments? Whereas being poor, or sick, or even being unjustly condemned, yes, even that—all these may be actually rewarding situations. Mind you, they aren't necessarily so. Far from it. But they *may* be; that is, if you react to them in the right way.

HUTTON

And yet most people would rather be an abortion.

LIBBARD

Of course. It's so much easier to be an abortion. Besides, the punishment often looks just like a prize for good behavior. The same bad seed may produce pheasant shooting and stockbrokers in one case, and *this* in another. But in either eventuality one can be perfectly sure that God is not mocked. Evil was sown and evil was duly reaped. And to grow into a fully developed human being—that's always a reward. However painful the process of growing may be, and however intolerable the burden of responsibility which it always entails.

HUTTON

And yet if you do assume the responsibilities, there's an extraordinary satisfaction. I was just discovering that with Doris. Of course, you know how it began. In wantonness, as a kind of joke. Deliberately shutting my eyes to what she really was in herself and thinking only of what I could get out of her, which was simply a kind of intoxication. A heightening of life and at the same time a deadening. The pleasure of dominating another human being through sensuality and the pleasure of annihilating one's own self. of taking a holiday from one's humanity. It only changed after she tried to kill herself. I suddenly saw her as a real person—a real person whom I'd treated as a thing, and very nearly destroyed. There she was—a human being, and I could be another human being. All through the trial, I

kept thinking of the time when we could go forward in that new relationship. But, now . . .

He shakes his head.

Last time she came I couldn't think of anything but myself, like in the old days—but for another reason. Or, basically, for the same reason. Then it was sensuality; now it's fear —and that's nothing but negative sensuality; sensuality with a minus sign in front of it.

LIBBARD

But if you accept the facts, if you will them . . .

HUTTON

Yes, the fear isn't so bad. I might think of *her* for a change. Poor child, she's coming again tomorrow.

LIBBARD

One human being saying good-by to another human being. It has a value, it makes some kind of sense.

There is a long silence. The warder approaches.

WARDER

Time's up, sir.

The two men rise and shake hands without speaking.

HUTTON

Still holding Libbard's hand.

You've done a great thing for me, Libbard.

LIBBARD

God bless you, Henry.

He squeezes HUTTON'S *hand, then smiles and speaks in another tone.*

And now let go!

He loosens his grip; HUTTON *does the same. Their hands drop.*

There! Do you feel it? We're in somebody else's hands now.

He turns and goes out, followed by the warder, who closes the door behind him. The light goes out in the cell and comes on again in the SPENCES' *drawing room.*

Act Three

Scene III

The SPENCES' *drawing room, late at night. In one corner of the room the* GENERAL *is playing chess with the* NURSE. *Seated some distance away from them, under the light of a standard lamp,* JANET *is poring over a volume of the Encyclopaedia. Several other thick reference books lie scattered on the floor around her chair. There is a long silence. The two chess players glance from time to time apprehensively at* JANET.

GENERAL

Whispering.

She won't listen to me. Perhaps if *you* tried . . .

The NURSE *nods, rises and goes over to* JANET, *to whom she speaks in her most brightly professional manner.*

NURSE

It's getting awfully late, Miss Janet. Don't you think you ought to toddle off to bed?

JANET

I've told you. I'm not going to bed. Not till . . . not till after eight o'clock tomorrow morning.

NURSE

That's just sheer unreasonableness, Miss Janet. What difference does it make whether you sit up or not? They're going to hang him whatever you do—and good riddance, that's what I say. So why not make yourself comfortable, while you can?

JANET

And have people doing things behind my back, when I can't see what they're up to? No, thank you. When's Dr. Libbard coming?

NURSE

I don't know. All he said was that it'd be very late. He had an urgent case to attend to.

JANET

I don't know why you ever sent for him. *I* don't need him.

NURSE

Well, your father wanted it. He's worried about you, my dear.

JANET

Libbard's got ideas in his head.

NURSE

Ideas? What sort of ideas?

JANET

Mind your own business.

NURSE

Now, Miss Janet, let me help you to bed, and then I'll bring you a nice glass of hot milk. And perhaps when Dr. Libbard comes, he'll give you something that'll really send you to sleep.

JANET

Oh, no! Not till it's all over. I'm not going to sleep till I know it's all right for me to sleep. I'm not a fool.

NURSE

Come along, dear. There's a good girl.

She lays a hand on JANET'S *shoulder.*

JANET

Violently.

Don't touch me!

She gets up.

NURSE

Where are you off to now?

JANET

I'm going to the library. Get out of my way.

She pushes past the NURSE *and goes out.*

NURSE

You see how she is? Goodness, I'm glad Dr. Libbard said he'd come.

She picks up the volume of the Encyclopaedia, which JANET *has just been studying, and looks at it.*

Guess what she's been reading about: capital punishment. I tell you, it frightens me.

She reads aloud.

"Ancient punishments, requiring no special apparatus, were drowning and precipitation from a height, as from the Tarpeian Rock. The Assyrians impaled their victims. Stoning and burning were the favourite punishments among the Hebrews of Old Testament times. In the Roman Empire crucifixion was used for all criminals who were not Roman citizens."

She shakes her head.

It's horrible.

She goes on reading.

"Hanging is now practised in Albania, the British Empire, Egypt, Estonia, Hungary, Japan, Latvia and some of the United States. France employs the guillotine."

GENERAL

Yes. Once saw a man guillotined in French Indo-China. Worse than slaughtering a pig. That's why I never liked big game shooting. Just butchery, that's all.

NURSE

She keeps saying she'll be all right after the execution; but I'm afraid it's gone too far.

GENERAL

You don't think it's . . . upset her mind, do you?

His tone is anxious.

NURSE

No, no. But it's a real nervous breakdown. It just shows what a shock it was to her, poor thing. That beast of a man! And to think that, if I hadn't done what I did, he'd still be flaunting around with that girl of his, smoking his cigars and showing off his rude pictures, as if he was the lord of creation.

GENERAL

I don't care what he did. I liked him. Good fellow.

NURSE

Good fellow, indeed!

GENERAL

And a gentleman. Which is more than can be said for most people nowadays.

NURSE

And a fine gentleman he'll look tomorrow morning, at the end of a rope!

JANET re-enters at this moment, carrying several heavy, dictionarylike volumes.

JANET

Suspiciously, pointing at the volume of the Encyclopaedia in the NURSE'S *hands.*

What are you doing with that?

NURSE

Just improving my mind, that's all. Adult education—isn't that what they call it?

JANET

Snatching the volume out of the NURSE'S *hands.*
You're trying to spy on me.

NURSE

Spy on you?

JANET

I tell you, you'd better be careful. I know your tricks. You're working with Libbard.

NURSE

But, Miss Janet . . .

JANET

Go away! Leave me alone!
She gives the NURSE *a push.*

NURSE

Now, now, don't be so impatient. A cat may look at a king.
She returns to the chess table and sits down.
Well now, it was my move, wasn't it?
She looks at the board for a little, then moves.
There! Put *that* in your pipe and smoke it!
The GENERAL *immediately moves and takes her piece.*

GENERAL

Ha ha! I was hoping you'd be fool enough to do that.

NURSE

And I never saw it. Oh, dear, oh dear, whatever shall I do now?

A silence. The NURSE *stares at the board.* JANET *looks up references in the volumes she has brought with her. A bell rings in the distance.*

NURSE

In a whisper.

Thank goodness!

She gets up and goes out of the room. JANET *is so deeply absorbed that she does not notice what is happening. There is a silence.*

GENERAL

Janet!

She does not look up. He calls more loudly.

Janet!

JANET

Starting.

What is it, father?

GENERAL

I want you to promise me something.

JANET

Suspiciously.

Oh . . . it depends what it is.

GENERAL

No, promise first.

JANET

Well, I suppose I can trust you.

GENERAL

Take a rest, take a good holiday. You haven't been away for months and months. I don't need you. I've got this damned woman here. So don't think of me. Go abroad. Get away from it all.

JANET

Get away from it all. That would be wonderful.

GENERAL

You've been worrying too much. Making yourself ill. After all, Emily's dead. Worrying won't bring her back. What's the good of it?

JANET

Sometimes one can't help doing a thing—even when it isn't any good.

GENERAL

Don't I know it?

He holds out his hand, which trembles violently.

What's the good of *that*? Spill the soup, that's all. But I can't help it. And what's the good of *me*, if it comes to that? So carry on as if I weren't here. Go away. Have a spree. You promised.

JANET

Smiling.

All right. I'll have a spree.

GENERAL

And damn the expense! None of your Swiss pensions. Good hotels, decent restaurants. I'll give you the money.

JANET

That's too sweet of you, father.

GENERAL

Free as a bird. Start tomorrow, if you want to.

JANET

Tomorrow!

GENERAL

And pick up a husband while you're about it.

JANET

Her expression suddenly changing.

Father, please!

GENERAL

Wouldn't even mind if it were a foreigner. No Germans, though. I'd hate to have a lot of little Huns for my grandchildren.

JANET

Coldly.

If you don't mind, I'll go on with this.

She turns back to her book.

GENERAL

Sorry, sorry. Put my foot in it again.

The door opens, and DR. LIBBARD *and the* NURSE *enter the room.*

LIBBARD

Good evening, Janet.

JANET

Coldly—without looking up.

Good evening.

LIBBARD

To the GENERAL.

Oughtn't you to be in bed by this time, General?

GENERAL

In a whisper.

Didn't want to leave the girl alone. She's ill. Ought to have a rest. Ought to have a complete change.

LIBBARD

You're right.

GENERAL

Been trying to persuade her. So back me up, will you?

LIBBARD

I'll do my best.

To NURSE.

I think you'd better take the General to his room.

The NURSE *starts to wheel the chair toward the door. He expresses his desire to be wheeled near* JANET. *The* NURSE *brings him close to* JANET'S *chair, and he lays his hand on her arm. She starts violently, then seeing her father, makes an effort to readjust her face to a smile.*

JANET

Oh, it's you.

She shudders, looks round apprehensively, then pulls herself together, smiles, gets up, goes to the door and holds it open. The chair is wheeled out.

Let's just see if everything's all right.

She goes out, closing the door behind her.

Left alone, LIBBARD *picks up the volume* JANET *has been reading. He looks at it, raises his eyebrows. And putting it down again, he takes two or three turns up and down the room, then comes to a halt in front of the grandfather clock, which registers approximately* 1:30 A.M. LIBBARD *opens the glass front*

of the clock and pushes the hands forward one hour, then does the same with his watch. After which he goes to the book shelves, and selects a volume, which he starts to read under one of the lamps. A short time passes. JANET *returns from the* GENERAL'S *room. There is a silence.*

JANET

Still here? I hoped you'd be gone. I don't know what you ever came for.

LIBBARD

Well, it's a pretty unpleasant occasion. I thought you might like a shot.

JANET

What sort of a shot?

LIBBARD

To send you to sleep. I don't like this sort of thing as a general rule. But in the circumstances . . . I could give you something that would knock you out for the best part of twenty-four hours.

JANET

Suspiciously.

And meanwhile what would you be doing?

LIBBARD

Laughing.

Do you think I'm in the white slave business?

JANET

First you try to have me hypnotized; then you want to give me a shot. No, no. I'm going to keep my eyes open.

LIBBARD

But I thought you wanted to be able to shut them?

JANET

Not now. Not till . . . not till it's safe.

LIBBARD

Safe? What do you mean?

JANET *does not answer, but turns away to the grandfather clock.*

JANET

Twenty-five to three. I didn't realize it was so late.

LIBBARD

Consulting his watch.

Yes, that seems to be about the right time.

JANET

Five and a half hours more.

A pause.

Do people ever die of fear?

LIBBARD

I suppose it could happen. But of course the heart would have to be in pretty bad shape.

JANET *walks restlessly about the room, then pauses to give a little kick to one of the volumes of the Encyclopaedia lying on the floor.*

JANET

These idiotic encyclopaedias! They never tell one the things one really wants to know.

LIBBARD

Such as?

JANET *takes another turn up and down the room before answering.*

JANET

When a man's hanged, how long does it take before he's dead?

LIBBARD

Matter-of-factly, without showing any surprise.
Well, it depends. If you just put a noose round his neck and let him strangle under his own weight, he mightn't die for five or ten minutes.

JANET

In a whisper.
Five or ten minutes . . .

She is silent for a moment, then utters a strange little grunt of laughter.

She checks herself by biting her lip, then puts her handkerchief to her mouth.

LIBBARD

Nowadays, of course, they don't do it like that. They let the man drop eight or ten feet before the rope tightens. The shock breaks his neck.

JANET

After a pause.

Do you think he deserves to die so easily?

LIBBARD

Who do you mean?

JANET

Well, any criminal, any murderer.

LIBBARD

Henry Hutton, for example?

JANET

I know why you said that. Just to get me angry. Just to make me say how much I hate him. It's part of your little scheme.

LIBBARD

What scheme?

JANET

Trying to make me lose my head. Then I'll say things I don't mean to say. But this time I'm not going to oblige.

You can talk about him as much as you like; *I* shan't say anything.

A pause.

Have you seen Doris again?

LIBBARD

This evening. She'd been at the prison, saying good-by.

JANET

I suppose she was in a terrible state.

LIBBARD

So would you be, in the circumstances.

JANET

Me? Are you comparing her to me?

She checks her rising anger.

You must have thought it funny when I got so angry with her the other day.

LIBBARD

Well, of course, funny things do happen, when one's nerves are on edge. I confess, though, I was a bit surprised. You used to say you liked the poor girl.

JANET

I do. Really I do.

LIBBARD

Well, you certainly had a curious way of showing it.

JANET

It's only when I think of what they did together—and then I remember poor Emily, and I just can't bear it. I can't bear it.

LIBBARD

Oh, I see. I hadn't thought of Emily.

JANET

You wouldn't! Why should you? You're a man. A man doesn't like thinking about ugliness and suffering.

LIBBARD

In my line of business I find I can hardly think about anything else.

JANET

Yes, but only in a professional way. For you, Emily was just a case—that's all. You never thought of her as I do—as a dupe, as a victim. Hoodwinked, lied to, outraged. Yes, outraged. Imagine it—somebody you trusted, somebody you cared for and believed in; and suddenly you find him in the act of befouling all the things that seemed to you most sacred, throwing mud in a church, writing filthy words on the pillars. That's what Emily had to put up with.

LIBBARD

And that's why *you* felt you had to use filthy words when you talked to Doris.

JANET

I didn't.

LIBBARD

My dear, I was there. And did it occur to you, by the way, that *she* might have been outraged? Having a love affair doesn't necessarily make one lose one's finer feelings. On the contrary, one sometimes acquires them in the process. Especially tolerance. Tolerance and pity.

JANET

Tolerance for adultery, pity for murderers—is that it?

LIBBARD

Precisely. Pity for murderers. And for a very simple and practical reason. Eight o'clock at Pentonville—but for the grace of God, there goes James Libbard. And, but for the grace of God, there goes Janet Spence.

JANET

No, no!

She checks herself and forces a laugh.

Happily there *was* the grace of God.

LIBBARD

It would still be possible to do it.

He looks at his watch.

JANET

To do what?

LIBBARD

To have the execution postponed.

JANET

Why should it be postponed?

LIBBARD

If some entirely new fact were to turn up.

JANET

What do you mean? Are you trying to get me to do what Doris wanted? I tell you, she didn't threaten to kill herself.

LIBBARD

She did. But I don't think she carried out the threat.

JANET

No, of course not. She was killed.

LIBBARD

But not by Hutton.

JANET

They proved it!

LIBBARD

The jury thought that they proved it. But do you?

She stares at him without answering.

Think it over, Janet.

He gets up and walks about the room.

Of course, I can quite understand your not wanting to go to sleep until you feel you're safe. But did you ever stop to analyze the word? Safe from what? Safe in which respect? You can shut the door against one danger, and be wide open to another. Safe from death, for example, and safe from going mad under the fear of death. But does that mean you're safe from going mad because you've refused to face the danger of death, because you feel guilty for having refused? And does that mean that you won't be tempted, in the misery of your madness, to do away with yourself? But, that's death again. You run away from death and madness. But, what do you run into? Madness and death. But, if you don't run away, if you face the facts, if you accept your destiny and not only accept it but will it—then there's something like a certainty of escaping madness, and a very good chance of escaping death.

There is a long silence.

JANET

Well, I'll think about it.

She gets up and goes over to the table on which stands a tray with a siphon, glasses and a bottle of whisky.

I'm terribly thirsty.

She pours some soda water into a glass and drinks.

Would you like a drink?

LIBBARD

Yes, that's a good idea.

While she is busy with the glasses and the bottles,

he stands with an elbow on the mantelpiece, looking at a bronze Indian figure.

Kali, isn't it? The Great Mother. And precisely because she's the mother, she's also the goddess of destruction.

JANET, *meanwhile, has been tinkling about among the glasses, with her back to the audience. He calls to her without turning his head.*

Not too much whisky, by the way. Just a *chota* peg, as your father would say.

JANET

Just a *chota* peg.

LIBBARD

Still holding the statuette.

If you give life, you must also give death, inevitably.

JANET

Approaching.

Here you are.

She sets the glass down on the mantelpiece.

LIBBARD

Thanks. I must say they had a pretty realistic view of the world, these old Hindus.

He replaces the statuette and, while doing so, upsets the glass of whisky and soda as though by accident.

JANET *utters a cry.*

Clumsy ass! I'm really awfully sorry. However, I don't think it'll do any harm to the carpet, do you? Just a little

fizzy water and a spot of alcohol, that's all. Am I allowed another glass?

He moves toward the table.

JANET

Let me get it for you.

LIBBARD

Don't bother.

He fills himself another glass.

To your better health.

He drinks. JANET *looks at him for a few seconds, then starts to laugh.*

What's so funny?

JANET

I don't know. Nothing.

The light goes out and comes on in the other half of the stage.

Act Three

Scene IV

HUTTON'S *cell.* HUTTON *is reading. The door opens and an elderly warder enters.*

WARDER

You ought to try and get some sleep, Hutton.

HUTTON

Sleep?

He utters a little laugh.

I'll be sleeping like a top in a few hours. Why anticipate?

A silence.

WARDER

Did you see the chaplain this evening?

HUTTON

Nodding.

We had a long talk about my favorite text.

WARDER

What's that?

HUTTON

"God is not mocked: as a man sows, so shall he reap."

WARDER

That's the truth! But, I tell you, there's many a man comes here that can't bring himself to admit it.

HUTTON

Yes, I know. They all say they're innocent.

He smiles.

Well, believe it or not, in this case it happens to be true.

WARDER

Cautiously.

That's not for me to judge.

HUTTON

Innocent of the thing they condemned me for—but, God knows, not innocent of anything else.

He starts to turn back the pages of his book.

I was just reading something here—something very extraordinary.

He starts to read aloud, very slowly and distinctly.

"The difference between a good man and a bad man does not lie in this, that the one wills that which is good and the other does not, but solely in this, that the one concurs with the living, inspiring spirit of God within him, and the other resists it, and can be chargeable with evil only because he resists it."

WARDER

It's a bit too deep for me.

HUTTON

Deep, yes; but clear, crystal clear. Don't you see what a lot of things it explains? For example, why did Christ think that the scribes and Pharisees were worse than the publicans and sinners? And, remember who the scribes and Pharisees were—the good citizens, the presidents of the chambers of commerce, the members of parliament, the successful lawyers, the professors of theology—all the really sound, respectable people. And he regarded them as being worse, in some ways, than the scum of the earth. And, of course, if a bad man is bad simply because he shuts himself off from the spirit of God within him, then it's obvious why he thought like that about the scribes and Pharisees. They were all so busy doing the proper, conventional things and all so cocksure of being the benefactors of the human race that it was impossible for them even to be aware of the spirit of God within them—much less to concur with it. And when you're in that state, I suppose you're in hell, though you mayn't know it, of course—not at the moment; but later on, perhaps, somewhere else. God knows.

He shrugs his shoulders. Then, slightly smiling to himself, he closes his eyes and quotes.

It is a party in a parlor,
Crammed, just as they on earth were crammed,
Some sipping punch, some sipping tea,
And all as silent as could be.
All silent, and all damned.

He reopens his eyes and smiles at the WARDER.

And if they'd been talking—talking the sort of stuff people usually talk at parties—the damnation would have been even more complete.

There is silence. The WARDER *touches one of* HUTTON'S *hands, the knuckles of which are plastered with adhesive tape.*

WARDER

How are your hands?

Stretching them out, HUTTON *folds and unfolds his fingers.*

HUTTON

Still a bit sore. But, there won't be any more hammering on doors. Not now. And, by the way, I'd like to thank you for being as gentle with me as you were.

He holds out his hand, and the WARDER *takes it.*

WARDER

I'm sorry if I ever had to be rough or anything. It was all in the course of duty, you understand.

HUTTON

Well, it was nothing to what I've done in the course of *not* doing my duty. That's why I'm here, I suppose . . . for resisting the spirit of God within me; resisting it by means of lies, by means of lust, by means of insensitiveness toward other people, by means of every kind of selfishness. And, in the intervals, resisting it by being a rich, respected member of the ruling class.

WARDER

But those aren't crimes.

HUTTON

No, there's something more fundamental than crimes, something worse in a certain way. That's why they can't be punished by law.

A pause.

Life has to be lived forwards; but it can only be understood backwards. I suppose that's why we always make the important discoveries too late.

WARDER

Do you think it's ever too late? I'm a Christian myself; I believe in the life everlasting.

HUTTON

Well, you may be right. And even if *we* don't go on, perhaps our thoughts do. There seems to be no obvious reason why they shouldn't.

A pause.

People who love one another are always saying that their love's going to last forever. I used to think it just twaddle. And so it is, in a lot of cases. But not always. Real love carries a conviction of permanence. I've learned that by experience. And if thoughts go on—well, the conviction's based on something objective, it corresponds to some kind of fact.

He is silent. The prison clock sounds the quarters, then strikes five.

Would you mind if I asked to be alone now?

The WARDER *nods and, after they have shaken hands in silence, goes out.* HUTTON *takes a couple of turns up and down his cell, then resumes his seat. He remains quite still, lost in thought. The curtain slowly falls.*

SLOW CURTAIN

Act Three

Scene V

The SPENCES' *drawing room. The lights are still burning; but it is already light.* LIBBARD *and* JANET *are seated at a card table, playing a game of beggar-my-neighbor.* JANET'S *manner has become strangely childish. She is greatly excited and she keeps bursting into peals of laughter.*

JANET

Dealing out a card from her portion of the pack.

A king!

LIBBARD

Dealing out three cards.

One, two, queen of hearts!

JANET

Dealing.

One, ace of diamonds!

LIBBARD

One, two, three. I daren't look at the fourth.

He turns it up at last.

Thank goodness! Another queen.

JANET

Let's see what *I* can do.

She turns up a card.

Knave of clubs.

LIBBARD

Heavens! Well, here goes!

He turns up a card.

Oh!

JANET *laughs triumphantly and takes all the cards that have been dealt out into her hand.*

JANET

Mine, all mine! You're no good at all.

LIBBARD

I'm just not clever enough, that's the trouble. This is a game that takes intellect.

JANET

Ready?

She deals a card, he does the same; this goes on through several exchanges until JANET *turns up a court card.*

At last! The king of spades.

LIBBARD

One, two. . . . Heavens, that's the end! You've done for me.

He holds out his empty hands to indicate that he has

no more cards. JANET *breaks out once more into delighted laughter.*

I owe you ten million pounds.

JANET

Eleven million.

LIBBARD

Eleven, is it? God help me! Here's sixpence on account.

He takes a coin out of his pocket and pushes it across to her.

I'll pay the rest by installments. Twopence a week till the Last Judgment. Is that agreeable?

He gets up and goes to the window to look out.

It's raining.

JANET

I like rain. I like it when it rains really hard, when there's thunder and lightning. . . .

She suddenly breaks off, and her expression changes.

Oh, God!

She puts her hands to her head, as though she had suddenly remembered something terrible.

God!

She covers her face and shudders.

And that girl, that girl. . . . Oh, it's too horrible. Like animals. I hate him, I hate him.

A silence. LIBBARD *goes over to her and lays a hand on her shoulder.*

LIBBARD

Do you know what the time is?

JANET *turns to the clock. It marks two minutes to eight.*

JANET

In a whisper.

Only two minutes.

LIBBARD

That's all. Two minutes. Then you'll be safe.

JANET

I'll be safe.

A pause.

They must have got everything ready on the scaffold. The rope, the straps. And now they're going down the stairs. And there's the governor of the prison and the chaplain. They're walking along the corridor. It isn't far. Just a few steps. They're at the door. Somebody puts a key in the lock and turns it. The door opens and there he is. There he is.

A silence.

Just because she was eighteen. Because of her mouth. Because of her skin.

The clock strikes eight.

Oh God, God, God!

She turns away and drops on to the sofa, sobbing. LIBBARD, *meanwhile, has been rummaging in his bag. He now approaches, holding a hypodermic syringe, swabs and a small bottle of alcohol.*

LIBBARD

There, there. It's finished. You needn't worry any more. You can go to sleep now.

He rolls up her sleeve, ties a rubber band round her arm, feels for the distended vein.

Now, hold quite still. This won't hurt. Just a prick, that's all. Quite still.

He inserts the needle into the vein and slowly empties the contents of the syringe.

Now lie still. Let yourself go.

He moves away to replace the instruments in his bag. By the time he returns to her, JANET *is in a semi-conscious condition.*

Feeling comfortable?

JANET

Drowsily.

Yes.

LIBBARD

You feel safe now, don't you?

JANET

Safe, yes—absolutely safe.

LIBBARD

Tell me, Janet, how did you get her to take the poison?

JANET

I put it in the coffee.

LIBBARD

You thought he'd ask you to marry him?

JANET

No, no. I don't want to talk about it.

LIBBARD

But it's true, isn't it?

JANET

I can't tell you.

LIBBARD

You thought he loved you? As much as you loved him?

JANET

It's too awful. Too humiliating.

Her voice breaks. LIBBARD *lays a hand on her arm.*

LIBBARD

It's all right. I won't torment you any more. You can sleep now. Sleep—deep sleep. Warm, soft, dark. Like black velvet. Think of black velvet and black fur. No light coming in, no dreams to interrupt you. Just sleep.

After a long silence, when he feels sure that JANET *is fast asleep,* LIBBARD *rises, takes an engagement book out of his pocket, looks up a number, then goes to the telephone and lifts the receiver.*

LIBBARD

Long distance.

Pause.

Battersea four six five six.

Pause.

All right, I'll hold on.

He gets up, goes to the clock and puts the hands back an hour; then does the same with his watch. He goes back to the telephone. After a few seconds the call goes through.

Wandsworth Prison? This is Dr. James Libbard speaking. I want to speak to the governor at once.

Pause.

Yes, it's on official business. Connected with the Hutton case. Extremely urgent.

Pause.

Thank you. I'll wait.

CURTAIN

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